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ABSTRACT

This report is designed to help readers understand the experiences of communities dealing with issues of education and race. It chronicles the experiences of 8 communities that convened conversations about education and race involving about 1,000 participants in over 60 public forums nationwide. The report presents strategies and hands-on tools for encouraging and helping communities interested in holding their own conversations on education and race. Section 1, "Stories from the Field," chronicles the experiences of eight communities. While geographically and demographically different, each confronts similar educational issues. They share information on such issues as community context, local partners, goals and objectives, planning, gathering facts, engaging the public, and the future. Section 2, "Tools and Lessons Learned," presents actual materials developed and used to plan and conduct effective conversations. It offers lessons learned from organizers and participants to improve discussion experiences, focusing on getting started, planning conversations, researching the school and community, engaging the public, publicizing the work, evaluating conversations, and moving on. Some of the report's findings are that conversation creates understanding; parents are eager for results; holding public forums on education and race is labor-intensive; relationships are critical; and diversity brings riches. An appendix presents national partners and funders. (SM)

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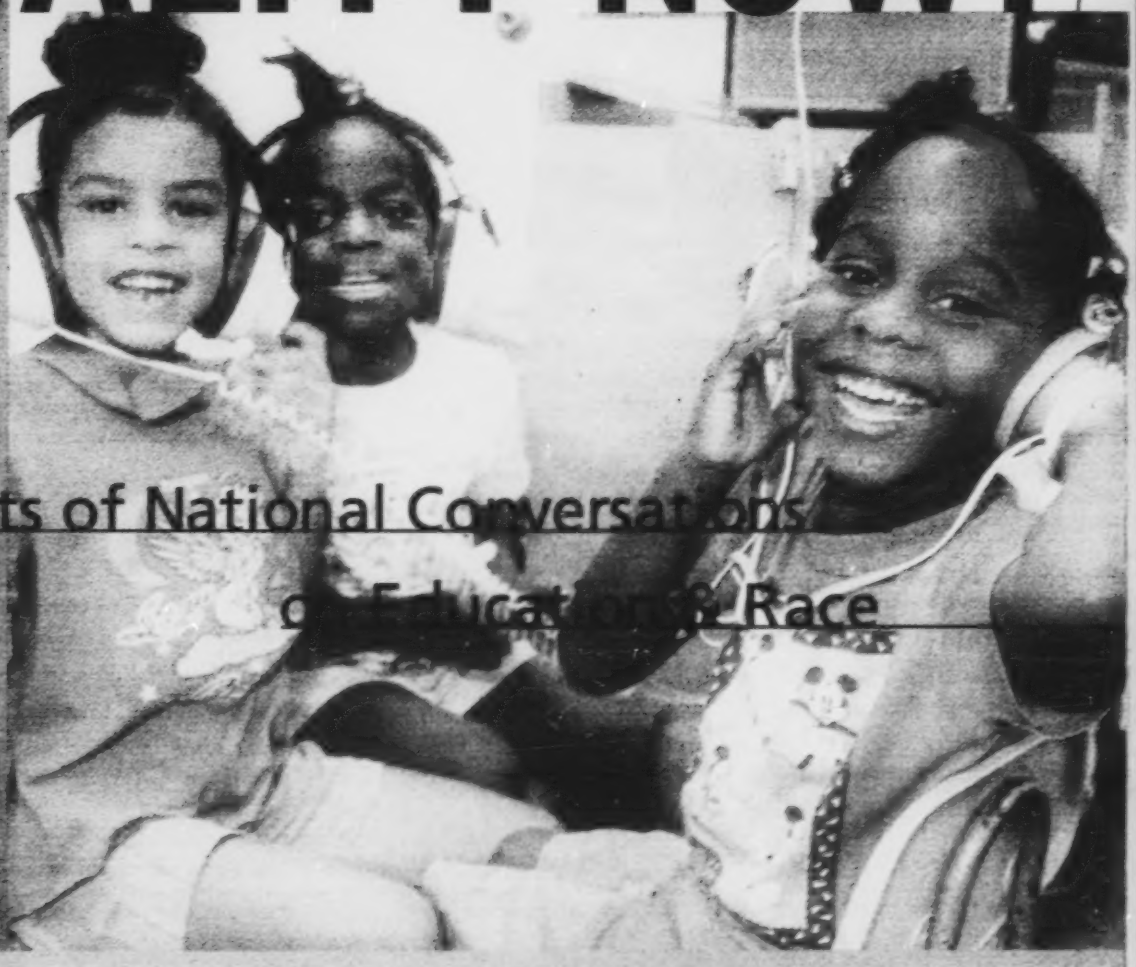
QUALITY NOW!



Results of National Conversations on Education & Race

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A JOINT PROJECT OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK AND PUBLIC AGENDA

FUNDED BY THE KELLOGG, MOTT, ROCKEFELLER AND SURDNA FOUNDATIONS

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THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON

Ms. Wendy D. Puriefoy
President
Public Education Network
601 13th Street, N.W.
Suite 900 North
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Ms. Puriefoy:

I want to congratulate the Public Education Network for your effort to make the central issues of education and race an open dialogue about the future. Community conversations about education and race provide a critical first step in moving from conflict to understanding, from ideas to action. This Administration remains committed to keeping the spotlight on these issues and supporting schools taking steps to help, but it ultimately falls to parents and communities to make sure this critically important conversation happens, and that all our children learn the value of diversity and education.

Education is the greatest anti-poverty program, the most powerful anti-discrimination strategy we could ever have. That is why I am committed to improving the quality of education for all children. We have made progress in recent years. Academic achievement is increasing, and more high school students are going to college. Nevertheless, not every student in America has access to a world-class education, and the children left behind are disproportionately likely to be poor or minority.

The findings of "Quality Now! Results of National Conversations on Education and Race" demonstrate what I have seen throughout the country – that regardless of whether they reside in affluent suburbs, rural townships or inner cities, parents across the racial and economic spectrum want the same thing for their children: high academic standards, adequate financial resources, a professional teaching force, and a chance to be involved in their children's education.

I have worked hard to help communities address disparities and inequities – speaking out about the need to ensure opportunity for all young people to meet high standards, insisting on accountability for student success, and championing efforts to close the digital divide. However, we still have a long way to go in securing a better future for all our children. We must work together to ensure that every child in America has full opportunity. Again, thank you for your efforts to further that vital goal.

Sincerely,

Al Gore

AG/rar

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THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

Ms. Wendy D. Puriefoy
President
Public Education Network
601 13th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Puriefoy:

I would like to congratulate the Public Education Network on the completion of its report, "Quality Now! Results of National Conversations on Education and Race." I am always pleased to hear about organizational efforts that focus on the educational needs of our children.

Equality of opportunity is central to the American way of life. That is why improving the quality of education for all children and addressing issues of equity and race are top priorities of the Administration. We have made progress in recent years. But still, not every student in America has access to these opportunities. Disproportionately, the ones left out are likely to be children who are poor or minority.

All across America, community conversations about education and the underlying issues of race provide a critical first step in moving toward understanding. Reports like "Quality Now! Results of National Conversations on Education and Race" help provide an educational opportunity for all young Americans. Through candid conversation directed toward action, diverse groups create opportunities for trust and partnership that are necessary for better schools and improved quality of life in communities.

I commend the Public Education Network and its local partners for exploring new ways to improve the quality of education for all children.

Yours sincerely,

Richard W. Riley

Our mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation.

THE UNSETTLED ISSUES OF EDUCATION AND RACE

by Wendy D. Puriefoy, president

VETERANS OF THE BATTLES TO CREATE greater racial balance in schools through busing, magnet schools, and open enrollment policies recognize that the conflicts surrounding race in education have never disappeared. But today we are waging different battles to address the same underlying issues of concentrated poverty, uncertified teachers, inadequate resources, and low expectations that characterize many poor-performing, urban public schools.

How serious are the problems? Data and anecdotes reveal the depth of the challenges that affect urban schools, those schools attended by one out of four students in the United States and 43 percent of the nation's minority young children. Research reveals that students who attend urban schools lag behind students in suburban and even rural schools on virtually every measure of academic performance. In fact, each year that they stay in school – if they do – finds them further behind.

Part of the problem is that urban schools do not have the kind of resources and the access to quality teaching available at other schools. It is deplorable that in a country as wealthy as ours, some schools have top-of-the-line computers, while others do not have enough textbooks or basic supplies for their students. And, urban districts are twice as likely as non-urban districts to have newly hired teachers who have only an emergency or temporary license.

Ensuring a quality teacher in every classroom is not just about the need for social justice and equal opportunities. It is about ensuring the economic success and social vitality of our nation, states, and local communities. Workers in the present economy must possess a higher level of skill and education than has been required in the past. No longer can high school graduates expect to find work in the factory that once employed their parents. That factory has been relocated abroad or replaced by sophisticated computer systems.

This upped ante has intensified the urgency to improve low-achieving schools. With the assistance of concrete data, the public is being forced to recognize the stark discrepancies between educational opportunities afforded students from different backgrounds. Today, we know that only about four out of ten of urban 4th graders score at the "basic" level or above in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federal program that tests a representative sample of students. Among 8th graders, only 42 percent reached or exceeded the basic level in mathematics. In contrast, two-thirds (66 percent) of students in non-urban districts performed at least at the basic level on each test. These differences – and wide gaps in performance on state assessments – are at the core of the unsettled and unsettling issues that surround race in education.

But the challenges are not simply measurable by the numbers presented in the myriad reports about student achievement. Over the past two years, the Public Education Network and Public Agenda conducted dialogues on race and education in eight communities. The forums brought together an estimated 900 participants in more than 60 public forums to discuss their concerns over the condition of education for all students, particularly those of color. In a country defined too often by its inability to address issues of race, these forums provided insight into the different perceptions and misconceptions of educational quality held by diverse members of the community.

In the conversations about education and race, African American parents appeared more adamant than white parents about raising educational standards. Their children had suffered or were suffering a different, less overt, form of oppression – the tyranny of low expectations, in which their children were held captive in an unending cycle of mediocrity. Because their children rarely were challenged to rise above the academic standards set before them, they were denied the opportunity to imagine themselves as high achievers in either school or life.

In fact, according to a recent Public Agenda poll, over half of African Americans believe that the state of education

for minority children has reached a crisis stage. That is why African Americans tend to show stronger support for vouchers than white Americans do. Their demonstrated support for vouchers reflects their sense of emergency over the issue. In reality, African Americans prefer a quality public school over any other alternative. A voucher is just a ticket out of a poor-performing school. It is not a strategy for improving poor performing schools.

Equally significant, in polls and conversations about race and education, white parents tend to recognize and support the benefits of diversity. But at the same time, they say that raising the number of poor and minority students brings down the quality of the schools. Is this racism? Does it have to do with class issues? Perhaps it is so ingrained in our psyches that "wealthier and whiter is better" that we carry this over and apply it to our schools, despite our egalitarian and democratic sentiments that diversity is good for society and schools.

From our conversations, we found that many community leaders were unaware of the dimension and depths of the problems surrounding education and race. In Berea, KY, for example, a local judge failed to see that racial inequalities still existed. An African American participant in the forum asked him to close his eyes and to picture himself as a black child walking around the community – through the shops, the post office, the town hall, the fire department, and finally the school – and finding no people who look like him in positions of respect and authority. As a white male, the judge lives in a world uncolored by the negative experiences of race; he does not see the effect of the absence of color. The judge's perspective shifted that day; he became the strongest advocate for the initiative to hire the school's first black teacher.

RAISING THE BAR

What can we do to address the hidden factors that limit student achievement? Making school decisions more transparent and data driven may be our best hope, but that too is fraught with controversy. The standards movement has been working to raise expectations and achievement for all students by introducing "high-stakes" tests created to help determine the kinds of interventions students need to succeed and whether or not students should advance from grade to grade or graduate high school.

The tests bring with them a broad range of questions: What do we do with language minority students who may need more time and special accommodations in testing? How can we ensure that the tests are actually aligned with standards and provide an accurate depiction of student performance? If we are to expect minority and low-income students to achieve at the same level as their white, suburban peers, how can we ensure that they have the resources and quality teaching they may need to succeed?

States are beginning to respond to these concerns by creating new or enhanced initiatives to provide special programs and additional learning time for students who are falling short of standards. Because reading is such a critical skill for success in all other subject areas, 16 states have already launched efforts to ensure that students can read in the early grades, and six more states have announced new, enhanced or proposed initiatives.

California is taking the lead on these issues. The state is working to create more incentives to recruit top-quality people into the profession and intends to pay teachers who choose to teach in troubled schools more than other teachers. The state also has plans to host summer Algebra Academies combining intensive professional development for teachers with instruction for middle school students who need extra help. After the summer sessions are completed, teachers would meet monthly throughout the school year to continue to learn and collaborate.

Policies like these are a step in the right direction, but only adding more resources and special programs will not solve the problems. We need to produce better tests that accurately reflect what students are expected to know. And we need more conversations about the interplay between race and education. Only through open community dialogue can we begin to improve the educational quality and opportunities offered all our students, regardless of the color of their skin.

"QUALITY NOW! RESULTS OF NATIONAL Conversations on Education and Race" chronicles the experiences of eight communities that convened conversations about education and race involving nearly 1000 participants in more than 60 public forums across the country.

"Quality Now!" is a set of strategies and hands-on tools intended to encourage and assist communities interested in holding their own conversations on education and race. By sharing the challenges, lessons learned, and outcomes from the eight initial sites, PEN and Public Agenda hope to amplify and sustain an important dialogue on the critical — but often hidden — intersection of education and race. The eight local education funds that sponsored events and forums included:

- Fund for Educational Excellence
  Baltimore, MD
- Forward in the Fifth
  Berea, KY
- Education Fund for Greater Buffalo
  Buffalo, NY
- Public Education and Business Coalition
  Denver, CO
- Partners in Public Education
  Grand Rapids, MI
- Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation
  Hattiesburg, MS
- Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute
  Oakland, CA
- Paterson Education Foundation
  Paterson, NJ

The efforts in these eight communities generated serious discussion among residents about what kind of communities they would like to inhabit, what kind of education they feel their children need, and what changes in the status quo they will support.

Specific findings from the initiative reveal:

1 **CONVERSATION CREATES UNDERSTANDING.** The goal of these conversations was to identify areas of challenge and opportunity, not to build consensus. Being heard and listening to others is an important part of creating a collective strategy for communities. In each of these communities, the process of talking these issues through also demonstrated that people are capable of changing their minds.

2 **PARENTS ARE EAGER FOR RESULTS.** Regardless of race, parents are impatient with the varying pace and impact of education reform. Parents are looking for solutions and actions that will improve the quality of schools immediately. They want to see changes that will help their children now, not wait for future changes that may or may not improve the quality of schools.

3 **CITIZENS SHARE HIGH ASPIRATIONS FOR STUDENTS.** Public engagement is a critical element of the standards movement. Although the locale and tenor of these conversations differed across the country, the sessions yielded remarkably consistent outcomes. Common aspirations included increased and more equitable funding, higher expectations for students, high-quality education in urban schools, and sufficient parental involvement. In addition, parents want input into setting the standards that determine what students know and are able to do.

4 **PARTICIPANTS WERE WILLING TO PROBE DEEPLY AND TAKE ON TOUGH ISSUES.** Participants believe that schools and communities must address cultural and class barriers. Participants recognized that the gap is widening between those with influence and those without it. In some conversations, the source of influence focused on socioeconomic status in lieu of, or interchangeably, with race.

5 **DATA ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PROVIDE OBJECTIVE INFORMATION FOR MEASURING PROGRESS OVER TIME.** Data on student achievement revealed significant — and sometimes painful — realities in nearly every community. Although data was readily accessible in some places, a number of communities had a difficult time collecting data disaggregated by race. Efforts to collect data were often met with resistance from educators who felt threatened by the idea of public discussions about student achievement, fearing they might be held accountable for inequities and their jobs might be at stake. A number of local education funds formed partnerships with area universities in the collection and analysis of data.

6 **HOLDING PUBLIC FORUMS ON EDUCATION AND RACE IS LABOR-INTENSIVE.** In several cases, organizers decided to scale back from their original plans because they had underestimated the amount of staff time and resources required to ensure a successful forum. In some communities, people were hesitant to discuss race directly. Instead, they used code words, such as "inner-city kids" and "poor children," which given school demographics alluded to specific racial groups. Participants also skirted the stark racial differences between students and teachers by vaguely referring to the "make-up of students and teachers" and asking if the school staff were "reflective" of the student body. It took time for people to feel comfortable enough with one another and to confront the issue of race in a straightforward manner.

7 **PARENTS OFTEN FEEL ISOLATED, POWERLESS, AND UNWANTED AS DECISION-MAKERS IN SCHOOLS.** An information gap exists between those working in education and those outside of education. Making education understandable and accessible to parents and caregivers was viewed as an important first step in forming true partnerships between communities and schools.

8 **RELATIONSHIPS ARE CRITICAL.** Mutual understanding and respect among citizens, teachers, and students are necessary for improvements in educational opportunity. These conversations on education and race conducted in the initiative may have been the first for many of the selected communities. But in each community, group dialogue led to collective action and coalition-building.

9 **DIVERSITY BRINGS RICHNESS.** The diversity of people in the groups was seen as the most meaningful aspect. Conversations in Paterson, NJ, for instance, involved more than 50 different ethnic groups, enough to create a multicultural environment and to present multiple issues. Different age groups, in addition to ethnic groups, brought a variety of voices.

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KEY FINDINGS:

What Stands in the Way of Better Schools

THE FOLLOWING ISSUES WERE IDENTIFIED as the interventions participants believe are necessary to improve the quality of schools in ways that will satisfy both black and white parents.

STANDARDS AS A VEHICLE TO RAISE EXPECTATIONS. High expectations are important at all levels. Beyond simply needing to see that teachers have high expectations of their children, parents also want to know that their child has a quality, certified teacher in every classroom. Even more than that, they need to believe that the internal gifts of their children will be drawn out. In turn, communities must overcome doubts of whether all kids can perform.

SCHOOL FINANCES MUST BE DISTRIBUTED EQUITABLY. Equity and finance issues are high on the list of priorities parents want to see addressed. Parents believe that more money should be invested in high-poverty schools. For instance, parents say that in a culture that demands that all students have an understanding and capacity to use cutting-edge technology, it is simply intolerable that many schools in poor communities still do not have basic textbooks.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT MUST BE TIED TO HIGH STANDARDS. No longer tolerant of schools in which students can't read, parents want to see their children receive tough assignments that are driven by high standards. Both black and white parents want to see an end to social promotion.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS MATTER. Parents are concerned with how and where teachers get assigned. They also want to see how well teachers know their subject matter and whether they can provide role models for their children. Parents want to see schools revisit staff plans and teacher credentials to ensure that the worst teachers — those with a record of poor performance in other schools — aren't sent to poor schools. In addition, black parents want to see more minority teachers.

DATA DRIVE CHANGE. Each of the eight sites were required to obtain disaggregated data for students in their communities. In addition, they were required to analyze the data to see how all students perform. This yielded powerful results. Until the community of Hattiesburg requested it, the state of Mississippi had not disaggregated data. Now having been pushed to do it, Mississippi is able to show local communities how their students perform academically.

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES IMPEDE COMMUNICATION. Parents who cannot speak English simply cannot communicate with teachers and students. In addition, even when there is no language barrier, teachers must learn to speak about education issues in ways that are clear and easy to understand. Otherwise, teachers and students, as well as teachers and parents, literally cannot understand each other.

CULTURE AND CLASS DIFFERENCES ARE AS SIGNIFICANT AS RACE. Many parents saw the differences between schools being less about race and more about class, as schools that perform well are often those in more affluent areas. In addition, cultural beliefs inhibit full participation in schooling. For instance, some Latino parents are reluctant to question authority, and therefore do not challenge teachers and school administrators when it comes to their children's academic performance.

GUIDELINES

for Conducting Conversations on Education and Race

THE EXPERIENCES OF EIGHT LOCAL education funds (LEFs) in the Education and Race initiative offer collective lessons for other communities and community-based organizations interested in managing conversations on the intersection of education and race.

1 **DON'T REVISIT THE PAST.** Although these conversations illuminate sometimes long-ignored issues of race, the purpose of the dialogue is not to talk about racism. The purpose of the conversation is to collectively improve education for all students. Focus on whether people's voices are heard in this way.

2 **APPROACH CONVERSATIONS ON EDUCATION AND RACE AS A FIRST STEP TOWARD BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST, NOT AS A ONE-TIME SOLUTION.** One-time events may bring short-term improvement, but real change occurs over time, with continuous public dialogue and strategic action by educators, parents, students, and community members. The complex issues of education and race are often deeply imbedded in local culture, history, and economics. As a result, they require a long-term commitment to change and ongoing examination to undo lingering effects. Remember: The purpose is not to resolve all the challenges facing the community's schools in one session. Create positive but realistic expectations.

3 **FOCUS PARTICIPANTS ON ONE SET OF ISSUES AT A TIME.** Taken alone, the topics of either education or race can overwhelm most Americans. Discussions on either subject can steer people down numerous paths. Research your schools and communities. Data on student achievement and race provide an important focus for planning healthy public conversations. If you use data, be sure that they are relevant, meaningful, and accurate. In addition, the success of conversations depends on the effectiveness of moderators. Choose them carefully and train them well.

4 **SELECT A CONVERSATION MODEL THAT REFLECTS THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.** Assess the political and cultural climate of the community before devising an approach to convening conversations about education and race. When community members are uncomfortable talking about race, a framework such as Public Agenda's conversation model (see page 67) is essential, as it allows for subtle discussions of race to be teased out. Other models, such as Education Trust's "Standards in Practice" or "fishbowls" or "kivas," can be effective when people are willing to talk openly, with little probing, about race and its impact on student achievement. Organizers may choose to draw on elements of more than one model to create a new format that responds to the distinct needs and reform capacity of each community.

5 **FORM STRONG AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY LINKAGES TO ENSURE BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT.** Partnering with community, business, and educational organizations is key to successful conversations. Identify organizations that will complement your organization's resources and experience. Establish clear roles and responsibilities for those involved. It is important that the broader community view partners, sponsors, project leadership, and volunteers as nonpartisan and credible. It will be easier to attract a diverse range of participants if the public trusts organizers and is not concerned about hidden agendas.

6 **TRUST THE PROCESS — PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS ON EDUCATION AND RACE CAN WORK.** Conversations about such difficult issues as education and race can be productive when well-organized community groups use structured approaches to public engagement. Some communities may worry that broaching such topics publicly can only lead to tension-filled shouting matches. As proven examples to the contrary, conversations in these eight communities occurred without incident. Participants expressed passionate views and listened to sincere concerns. Furthermore, these discussions led to the development of action plans for improving student achievement.

RACE IS FREQUENTLY AN UNSPOKEN barrier to school reform. Race is often imbedded in national, state and local education assumptions, philosophies, and policies. It can affect the way schools are financed, the way teachers are assigned to schools and students, the disparate expectations regarding student performance, and the variation in academic standards. These critical educational decisions, often colored by race and racism, have detrimental affects on the academic achievement of minority students. As a result of evidence in numerous communities nationwide to support these important findings, the Public Education Network (PEN) believes the pervasive influence of race on education needs to be a constant consideration when communities create education reform strategies.

In 1996, PEN formed a partnership with Public Agenda to probe the issue education and race and to develop ways to help communities re-think public education. The resulting initiative was entitled *A National Conversation: A Joint Project of PEN and Public Agenda*. Together, PEN and Public Agenda conducted research, developed a model for public engagement, and began implementation using a variety of approaches in communities across the country. Their work was made possible through the financial support of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the C. S. Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation.

PEN and Public Agenda awarded grants to eight local education funds (LEFs), which have served as pilot demonstration sites for conversations on education and race. The sites include Baltimore (MD), Berea (KY), Buffalo (NY), Denver (CO), Grand Rapids (MI), Hattiesburg (MS), Oakland (CA), and Paterson (NJ). Each site selected public engagement strategies based on individual school and community needs. Both PEN and Public Agenda provided ongoing support, technical assistance, and evaluation expertise to local education fund sites.

The initial conversations paved the way for "next steps" and "actions plans" in the host communities and offered lessons for other communities interested in sponsoring conversations on education and race.

Quality Now! chronicles the experiences of the initial conversation sites and offers detailed recommendations for creating future conversations and an assortment of tools for helping facilitate additional local dialogues. For more information on this initiative, contact the Public Education Network at 202-628-7460 or visit www.PublicEducation.org.

A Strange Chemistry

Just the mention of the word "race" can stir centuries-old suspicions, hostilities, and prejudices. American history has polluted the topic of race for Americans. And as toxic as racial issues can be, when mixed with issues of public education quality they can alter and even corrupt the best of intentions. Despite continuous redefinition and mutable laws, education and race – alone or combined – remain potent in defining and dividing Americans. As a result, the strange chemistry of education and race has weakened healthy discourse and slowed national progress toward effect school reform and equal educational opportunity.

Analyzing the Effects

Far too often the influence of education and race sets a predictable course for groups of American children. It can determine whether a child's path is broad, lit with high hopes and endless possibility, or simply dead-end, littered with broken promises and neglected potential. With identities, long-held beliefs, and futures at stake, it is not surprising that Americans find it difficult, and even painful, to engage in open and honest conversation about education and race.

The Public Education Network (PEN) and Public Agenda observed the absence of this necessary dialogue. By joining forces to conduct an in-depth examination of education and race, they sought to probe the views of citizens from across the country and find what impedes honest talk and clear the way for healthy public discourse. Public

Agenda conducted a random survey of African-American and White public school parents to explore their perspectives on education and race. Next, the Public Education Network made it possible for eight local education funds (LEFs) to involve local citizens in dialogue about how education and race intersect to influence public school quality.

Solutions for the Future

The urgent need to move on – despite our inglorious past – intensifies each day. While the nation grows more ethnically and racially diverse, will we erase the lines that divide us? Or, will we be kept apart by fear? As schools raise the bar with higher standards, will we lift *all* children to reach their potential or rest on familiar excuses?

This report highlights communities and organizations that are moving on, who believe racial diversity and public education can hold unlimited power to unite and strengthen our nation in ways not yet seen. Their public conversations on education and race create opportunities to voice past trespasses, identify current challenges, and envision future solutions. America is at the beginning of a new era and there is renewed hope that – through deep, honest discussion – we will soon dilute the troubling effects of race upon education.

— Richard Tagle
Senior Associate
Public Education Network
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THE PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK (PEN) and Public Agenda produced Quality Now! to:

- Help people engage in issues and help national and local leaders understand the concerns of citizens
- Structure deliberative and productive communication about race
- Build bridges between racial groups that lead to improved education for all children

Because of sensitivity surrounding the topic of race, the initiative unfolded in four phases to thoroughly probe and uncover the complexities and subtleties of views. Each phase built upon previous work and informs future work.

PHASE ONE: Conducting research and publishing *Time To Move On*

PHASE TWO: Developing the Town Meeting Framework

PHASE THREE: Selecting pilot demonstration sites and engaging citizens

PHASE FOUR: Disseminating tools and "lessons learned" to a national audience

PHASE ONE: CONDUCTING RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING *TIME TO MOVE ON* (APRIL 1998 – FEBRUARY 1999)

After listening to the voices of over 1,600 parents and educators, Public Agenda published *Time To Move On: African-American and White Parents Set An Agenda For Public Schools*, a report of its findings about education and race. Using in-depth telephone surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews, Public Agenda probed the personal experiences of parents, their views on broad social and political issues, their support for educational change, and finally, the role of race in influencing their views.

The research for *Time To Move On* focused sharply on measuring the views of African-American and White parents of children now in school. This initial focus on only two racial groups allowed for full exploration of intricate views and relationships, and Public Agenda is interested in conducting similar research with Hispanic, Asian American, and other minority parents.

Six key findings from Public Agenda's research are outlined in *Time To Move On*. These excerpted findings describe the views of the parents on issues of education and race. Contact Public Agenda at (www.PublicAgenda.org) for the full report.

FINDING ONE – *Message from Black Parents: Academics First and Foremost*

For African-American parents, the most important goal for public schools – the prize they seek with single-minded resolve – is academic achievement for their children. These parents believe in integration and want to pursue it, but insist that nothing divert attention from their overriding concern: getting a solid education for their kids. And despite jarring experiences with racism over the years, their focus is resolutely on the here and now. They want to move beyond the past and prepare their children for the future.

FINDING TWO – *Current Political Agenda: Time-Honored or Timeworn?*

African-American parents are firmly committed to promoting diversity in the schools, but they voice serious doubts about the policies commanding center stage in political and media debates. They see approaches such as affirmative action in school hiring as double-edged swords: they accomplish some goals, but they also have the potential for negative consequences and can often distract schools from their main task. Most African-American parents also accept standardized tests as valid measures of student achievement, and most say community discussion about education might be improved by less emphasis on race.

FINDING THREE – *Black Student Achievement: An Educational Crisis*

African-American parents' laser-like focus on academic achievement reflects deep anxiety about how their children fare in the nation's schools. They believe far too many Black children are not learning enough, and far too many of the schools they attend are unacceptably deficient. In their minds, the problem is at crisis point. White parents also believe African-American youngsters attend poorer schools and are less likely to do well academically, but they see the problem as limited to poor, urban areas and do not call the situation a crisis.

FINDING FOUR – *White Parents: Will My Children Have to Pay the Price?*

The views of White parents on race and the public schools are complex and often ambivalent. They want African-American children to receive a good education that will allow them to succeed and build strong lives for themselves. White parents often voice a sense of pride that their children's educational experience is far more diverse than their own. But they also have anxieties. They have often had to struggle to find good schools, and are concerned that their quality is tenuous. Many White parents fear that an influx of African-American students into a school would bring social and academic problems. Most say it is not the students' race, but the socioeconomic status of their families that concerns them. And they are deeply uncomfortable admitting what troubles them.

FINDING FIVE – *Integration: It's All in the Details*

Both Black and White parents say integration is valuable, but on closer examination White – and to some extent, Black – fears emerge. Both groups believe integrated schools improve race relations and enhance their children's ability to thrive in a diverse world. But they are also wary of associated costs: that schools will be distracted from academics, that bitter disputes will emerge, that their own children will end up paying the price. Whites are fearful that integration will bring troubled children into local schools; Blacks fear their children will be thrown into hostile and contentious school environments. Most parents want integration to occur naturally and are optimistic that things can improve. Ironically, relatively few have direct experience with efforts to achieve school integration.

FINDING SIX – *Of Like Minds: African-American and White Parents Set an Agenda for Public Schools*

Despite many differences in their experience and concerns, White and African-American parents have strikingly similar visions of what it takes to educate kids: involved parents, top-notch staff and schools that guarantee the basics, high academic expectations and standards, safety and order. White and Black parents also share considerable common ground on how to help Black children and failing schools improve.

PHASE TWO: DEVELOPING THE TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK (DECEMBER 1998 – FEBRUARY 1999)

Using its extensive research as background, Public Agenda created a discussion model, *Helping All Students Succeed In A Diverse Society*, to engage both urban and rural citizens in conversations on education and race. The report findings and other insights from producing *Time To Move On* enabled Public Agenda to create a model that responds to citizens' concerns about, and need for, discussing education and race in public forums. In addition to developing the discussion framework, Public Agenda designed video and written guides to help citizens begin exploring the issue together.

Public Agenda conducted six focus groups in six cities across the country to develop and test the Town Meeting Framework and video before releasing it to community-based organizations.

The Town Meeting Framework is designed to:

- Promote rich and productive dialogue among a broad cross-section of the community that clarifies areas of common ground, areas of disagreement, and concerns and needs for further information

- Help educators become more aware of the community's perceptions, misconceptions, questions, and values
- Help establish lines of communication so that new issues can be better addressed as they arise
- Begin to discuss ways race affects student achievement
- Build local capacity to create more – and even better – community conversations in the future
- Explore possible steps, beyond initial conversations, to engage the community at-large in ways to improve education

Town Meeting materials provide detailed instructions for each phase of a community conversation from planning and assigning tasks to selecting moderators, recruiting participants, and evaluating results. Community conversations are structured to run for three to four hours (including a meal), orientation, moderated small-group discussions, and a wrap-up session.

PHASE THREE: SELECTING PILOT DEMONSTRATION SITES AND ENGAGING CITIZENS (JANUARY 1999 – DECEMBER 1999)

Eight LEFs received grants of up to $25,000 to plan and conduct conversations on education and race. With support from PEN and Public Agenda, the representative LEFs sponsored community conversations throughout 1999 to stimulate honest, civil, and deliberative public dialogue. The grant supported the use of the Town Meeting Framework and allowed sites the flexibility of using it as a stand-alone conversation model or in conjunction with other public engagement models.

Collectively, local education funds (LEFs) and their partners brought together over 900 individuals for more than 60 public forums to discuss education and race. The conversation models varied and accordingly the public forums ranged in size, from seven up to 90 participants. Their efforts generated serious discussion among residents about what kind of communities they would like to inhabit, what kind of education they feel their children need, and what changes in the status quo they will support.

PHASE FOUR: DISSEMINATING TOOLS AND "LESSONS LEARNED" TO A NATIONAL AUDIENCE (THROUGHOUT 2000)

PEN and Public Agenda created a comprehensive plan for sharing the results of their research and the outcomes of community conversations with policymakers, educators, community groups, and funders across the country. Through conferences, briefings, videos, and publications, the partners will present the outcomes of Quality Now!, highlight the issues of concern among citizens, and seek policy changes that have a positive and long-lasting impact on the quality of public education for all children.

As part of the comprehensive dissemination plan, PEN has produced Quality Now! to encourage and assist other communities interested in holding similar conversations on education and race. By sharing the challenges, "lessons learned" and outcomes from the eight initial conversation sites, PEN and Public Agenda hope to amplify and sustain an important national discussion on education and race.

ABOUT THE QUALITY NOW! TOOLKIT

DIVIDED INTO TWO MAIN SECTIONS, Quality Now! is designed to help readers understand the experiences of other communities and carry out public conversations in their neighborhoods and schools. Readers may recognize the racial history and educational issues from other cities in their own communities.

SECTION ONE: STORIES FROM THE FIELD chronicles the experiences of eight communities. While geographically and demographically different, each community confronts similar educational issues. The LEFs offer insight into their conversations by sharing information on:

- Community Context: Introducing the Conversation Site
- Local Partners: Sharing the Work
- Goals and Objectives: Stating the Purpose
- Planning Process: Setting the Stage
- The Facts: Gathering and Sharing Student Achievement Data
- The Conversations: Engaging the Public (topics, themes, findings, and community voices)
- The Future: Sustaining the Conversation, Taking Action, and Producing Results

SECTION TWO: TOOLS AND LESSONS LEARNED presents actual materials developed and used by the Public Education Network and the LEFs to plan and conduct effective conversations. It offers lessons learned from organizers and participants to improve discussion experiences.

- *Getting Started* – shares ways to establish a clear and measurable direction, timeline, and budget to achieve results.
- *Planning the Conversations*– outlines step-by-step measures to coordinate a well-organized and broadly-supported initiative.
- *Researching Your Schools and Community* – identifies types of data on schools and students to better inform your community and strategies for data collection.
- *Engaging the Public* – details strategies to attract diverse participants and elicit honest responses to critical school and community issues.
- *Publicizing Your Work* – presents ideas and examples for getting the word out.
- *Evaluating Your Conversations* – offers survey instruments and strategies to measure effectiveness.
- *Moving On* – gives concrete examples of what communities can do to sustain the conversation and create progressive change.

Stories from the Field

Baltimore, Maryland

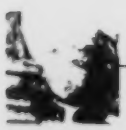
Berea, Kentucky

Buffalo, New York

Denver, Colorado

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Hattiesburg, Mississippi



Oakland, California

Paterson, New Jersey

Baltimore, Maryland

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Fund for Educational Excellence*

Founded in 1984, the Fund for Educational Excellence is a partnership of businesses, parents, educators, neighbors, and community members dedicated to improving student achievement in the Baltimore City Public Schools.

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Building Models for National Conversations on Education and Race*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

Much like other large cities across the country, Baltimore is grappling with a loss of its middle class to the suburbs and flux among remaining city residents – many living in poverty. Unlike most areas in Maryland, it is struggling to meet the educational needs of largely poor, African-American children.

With a student enrollment of 106,000, Baltimore City's public schools are nearly 90% African-American, and well over half of students are eligible for free-or reduced-priced lunch. State assessments have exposed dramatic achievement gaps between students in Baltimore City and elsewhere in the state, and between African-American and White students. Astonishingly high rates of students – 84% of third graders – in Baltimore City cannot read on grade level. Such dismal test results have focused state policymakers and local education advocates on improving minority achievement.

At the forefront of local efforts is the Fund for Educational Excellence which sponsors *Achievement First*, a whole-school change initiative centered on high educational standards. Holding public forums that examine the intersection of education and race seemed a fitting extension of its work on standards, expectations, and student achievement.

WWW.FFEE.ORG

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Fund for Educational Excellence

Champions for Children in Public Schools

LOCAL PARTNERS: SHARING THE WORK

Assembling a group of partners it deemed credible and valuable, the Fund drew on its respective expertise and ability to reach out to a cross-section of the city's residents.

Advocates for Children and Youth, a statewide research and policy group, framed student data in jargon-free language and recommended policies to remedy problems.

Baltimore Education Network (BEN), a coalition of parents and grassroots organizations, helped design the conversation model and promoted involvement among its constituents.

Education Trust, a Washington-based nonprofit organization, introduced national data and resources to help parents and community advocates understand standards, raise expectations, and take steps to close the achievement gap.

School, Family, Community Partnership, a Johns Hopkins University program, brought trained, school-based facilitators to lead conversations and disseminate project results.

Baltimore Sun and *Baltimore Times*, local newspapers, publicized the initiative through articles on student achievement and school reform issues.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: STATING THE PURPOSE

Integrating the public conversations into their core work, the Fund set out to:

- Identify and analyze the achievement gaps between children in Baltimore City and other children in the state of Maryland
- Convene groups of parents and community partners to discuss achievement gaps, beliefs about teachers and school expectations, and ideas about improving student performance
- Provide information for parents and community advocates about the role of standards-based instruction, and how student work can be used to measure a school's expectations of students
- Support and implement initiatives and policies that will help to close the achievement gap

PLANNING PROCESS: SETTING THE STAGE

The Fund knew that conversations about difficult topics – like education and race – require considerable planning and strong facilitation. Fund program officer Jennifer Economos-Green managed the overall project, while an eight-member planning committee – comprised of partners, district administrators, and parents – developed a script and public engagement format for the conversations. A team of 25 experienced facilitators, recruited by project partners, laid essential foundations with stakeholders in schools and across the community.

To deepen connections to its core work, the Fund decided to conduct two types of public engagement. Its own model, modified from the Education Trust's *Standards in Practice*, was used in 20 school-based sessions and remains an integral element of its *Achievement First* initiative. Two town meetings, using the Town Meeting Framework, were used for discussions in the broader community.

Economos-Green says, "It was more intensive than any other project I've ever worked on." Planning the conversations took the Fund into uncharted territory – convening new and diverse community collaborators, finding facilitators with appropriate skills and experience, and exploring ways to reach audiences at the grassroots level – which engaged staff and volunteers over several months.

THE FACTS: GATHERING AND SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

The Fund's early work on standards revealed that very little is expected of students. Believing that concrete evidence about teacher expectations should drive conversations, the Fund used actual student work and assignments from local teachers in some of its sessions. During these sessions, groups of teachers, administrators, and parents used citywide standards and rigorous state test requirements to develop rubrics, define excellent work, and as-

sess the quality of local teacher assignments and student work. The exercise increased participants' understanding of the links between high expectations, rigorous standards, and increased student achievement.

THE CONVERSATIONS: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

In Baltimore, the Public Agenda town meeting model enabled a diverse mix of city residents, including students, to delve into the question of why expectations and performance are so low. Well-trained moderators elicited participants' views on race in a non-threatening way. The *Standards in Practice* sessions used assessments of quality work to provide a clear direction for parents and educators on how to take an active role in improving student achievement.

A participant observed that conversations, "were fairly open about needs and problems." The first town meeting – held in the heart of the city – attracted more African Americans and was more diverse than the second meeting on the outskirts of town. Organizers found that the more diverse the group – race, gender, economics, experience, and age – the better the conversation.

Acknowledging the city's high rate of adult illiteracy, organizers took special measures during meetings to encourage full involvement from all participants. Facilitators read aloud written materials and instructed participants to work as a group on writing assignments. Organizers report, "While it was clear that some participants were largely illiterate, it did not seem to impact their participation."

CONVERSATION MODELS

TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK
2 town meetings
41 participants (total)
Urban League office and a local church
October 1999

STANDARDS IN PRACTICE
20 school-based sessions
324 participants (total)
public schools across the city
October – November 1999

Topics, themes, findings

The sessions, involving residents from across the city and using different formats, yielded remarkably consistent concerns. Among the most common were inequitable funding, low expectations for students, lack of quality education in urban schools, and insufficient parental involvement. Organizers report one notable disagreement: "In one group there was a clear division between people who felt that teachers were most accountable, and those who believed that parents are ultimately responsible for their children's education."

Economos-Green observed a generation gap during the discussions. "Students and middle-aged people had different opinions and perspectives." She believes education should also be examined through a "generational lens." Bringing together participants with a range of experiences – shaped by age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education – can enrich group discussions by challenging misconceptions and stereotypes. Richer discussions produce better ideas and results.

Community voices – involving local partners

Tru Ginsberg, on staff at the Baltimore Education Network (a Fund partner), served as an organizer. She also served a participant and then facilitator for the conversations. With a well-rounded perspective, she found the involvement of community partners a crucial element, stating, "Publicity alone is not effective." Members of the partner organizations made a lot of personal appeals for their constituents to attend. As a result, she says, "I heard voices I'd never heard before."

Another organizer told how parents – many feeling cheated by public schools – recalled, "having graduated (from city schools) with A's and B's, enrolling in college, and being told they were only fit for remedial courses." One parent shared that on the morning of the session, her daughter had cried over breakfast from worry she'd do poorly on the SAT because of easy high school assignments.

THE FUTURE: SUSTAINING THE CONVERSATION, TAKING ACTION, AND PRODUCING RESULTS

The Fund has discovered that its conversations are changing schools and partners in intentional and unanticipated ways. "An unintended outgrowth of this initiative has been the opportunity to provide training in this model (*Standards in Practice*) to nearly every administrator (a total of 180) in the Baltimore City School system, and the city school board, " says Economos-Green. She reports that one influential participant was so impressed, he called a special meeting of the school board for a three-hour presentation on the model. She exclaims this degree of engagement with districtwide policymakers is "unheard of!"

The Fund's partners are also reshaping their work because of the conversations. The Baltimore Urban League is training its staff to use the Public Agenda video and framework for discussions on race. In schools, principals indicate an increase in the number of parents who are discussing standards and the quality of their children's assignments.

Baltimore's plans for sustaining new relationships and community interest include:

- Expanding the use of *Standards in Practice* by training school improvement teams and educating the broader community.
- Using its completed data analysis in future town meetings and in reports to district administrators, principals, community organizations, and funders of school initiatives.
- Publishing samples of "quality student work" in school newsletters and local newspapers.
- Assessing the district's professional development resources and developing a more deliberate and relevant training system.
- Encouraging local education advocates – partners in the conversation – to refocus on standards.

Berea, Kentucky

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Forward in the Fifth*

Founded 13 years ago by prominent newspaper publishers and editors in eastern Kentucky, Forward in the Fifth has a tradition of engaging the public around education issues. As a community-based, nonprofit organization, it works to bring communities and schools together to ensure that all children have the educational opportunities they need for full and productive lives.

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Education and Race in Eastern Kentucky*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

Talking publicly about education and race is virtually unheard of in the communities served by Forward in the Fifth. Set in rural, eastern Kentucky, a region of mostly poor White residents, the conversations sponsored by Forward in the Fifth offer a distinct perspective. The region includes 39 Kentucky counties, 55 public school districts, 150,000 students, and towns with few residents of color – less than 5% and mostly African-American. The relatively low number of minorities, however, belies the influence of race on the region's schools.

Of concern in the African-American community for decades, problems of education and race include few minority teachers, low expectations for students of color, incidents of blatant racism, and a curriculum void of multicultural perspectives. The recent arrivals of a Japanese auto plant and Hispanic migrant workers have increased the number of minorities in the region. Pockets of all-White communities remain, but as new and diverse residents arrive, schools are seeking ways to teach tolerance, raise awareness about other cultures and races, and meet the needs of all students.

Upon learning of PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative, Forward in the Fifth recognized the value of organizing the region's first multiracial forums to foster frank, yet productive, discussion about education and race.

WWW.FIF.ORG

FORWARD in the FIFTH

LOCAL PARTNERS: SHARING THE WORK

Experienced in education and public engagement, Forward in the Fifth selected a partner with roots in anti-racism and social change to complement its work.

> *Democracy Resource Center (DRC)*, a multiracial, grassroots organization, lent its reputation and experience in the region to plan public forums and reach out to community residents.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: STATING THE PURPOSE

By holding public forums in three communities, Forward in the Fifth and DRC aimed to:

- Set and achieve community-driven goals
- Cultivate leadership among county residents
- "Unveil racism" in schools
- Bring positive change in schools to combat racism

PLANNING PROCESS: SETTING THE STAGE

The partners began developing the initiative by identifying regional problems related to education and race. Deciding to hold town meetings – using the Town Meeting Framework – in three targeted counties, they looked to their respective staffs and boards of directors to identify moderators and participants. They also posted a "call for moderators" on the University of Kentucky electronic listserv and publicized town meetings in monthly organizational mailings and through local newspaper coverage.

Designated community leaders in each county selected meeting locations and organized local logistics. DRC also held a series of pre-meetings with minority leaders in each county to spread the word about the conversations and to build trust among residents. Often kept on the fringe of their small, rural communities, many African Americans know speaking out on sensitive topics could have unwanted repercussions in the workplace and in schools. During the pre-meetings, organizers eased the concerns of community leaders and assured residents a "safe place to speak out." This extra measure helped draw strong African-American participation at the town meetings.

Public Agenda staff traveled to Kentucky to train fourteen moderators, who later held two practice sessions. One practice session was with students participating in a summer leadership camp and another was with the partners' boards of directors. Organizers found thorough training for facilitators and ample time to practice their skills essential for effective meetings.

THE FACTS: GATHERING AND SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

Organizers turned to the state department of education for student data. They comment that, at first, state officials seemed unsure of how to respond to their request for data. Efforts to collect data proved one of the greatest challenges, but their persistence paid off. The state and local school districts provided data on the racial breakdown of students, dropout rates, and the enrollment of White and minority students in gifted, special education, and college programs. The low numbers of minority students in several districts prohibited the racial disaggregation of some data for fear it could violate student confidentiality laws.

Student data is not an integral component of the Public Agenda model and organizers decided to distribute "data packets" – containing student data as well as census data and newspaper articles on education and race – at the end of town meetings.

CONVERSATION MODELS

TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK

3 town meetings
90 participants (total)
Community meeting places across the region
August – October 1999

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THE CONVERSATIONS: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Drawing people from all walks of life, Forward in the Fifth held conversations in three counties encompassing seven school districts. Organizers offered transportation to ensure that residents of the rural communities had access to the town meetings.

The makeup of the participants influenced the conversation. The first two conversations included mainly African Americans – parents and grandparents, but few educators. The third was racially mixed, but heavily attended by educators. Forward in the Fifth organizer Beth Dotson observed that some African-American parents would not talk about race directly, even when moderators probed. When speaking about problems in schools, she says some used codes, like "those people." Other observers note that, in at least one session, African Americans were very direct and open in discussing race. Dotson remarks that the "personality of each group was different."

In the earlier practice session with all White participants, "Classism was discussed more than racism," Dotson reports, but they stated "both are issues that need to be addressed." And despite the coded language, participants broached sensitive and difficult topics and even disagreed at times.

Topics, themes, findings

Issues emerging from town meetings include:

- Lack of African-American educators in schools
- Racial incidents being ignored by educators and African-American community members
- Lack of student diversity in some schools
- Negative effects of racism, classism, and sexism on self-esteem and achievement
- Lack of sensitivity to Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and other minorities
- Low expectations of all students, but even lower expectations of African-American students
- Need for more community forums to discuss education and race with those in authority present

Community voices – a town meeting participant

Ed Ballinger, an African American and recognized community leader, has long been concerned about education in his community. As a participant in one of the town meetings, he found the conversations effective. "There was open discussion. People stated what was on their minds. People did not back away from their opinions."

He found the student data and Public Agenda research particularly telling. "It hit right at home," Ballinger says, noting that local issues are common problems in other communities. "All kids are not getting the same educational opportunities."

Ballinger is disturbed by the high dropout rate among young Black men and asserts, "We need African-American counselors and teachers." He and others have actively pursued this and other issues from the town meetings with district administrators. After participating in a recent school forum with principals and parents, he believes the community's response to the town meeting has "opened the eyes of the people at the school system."

His advice to other communities facing similar issues: "Don't give up. Keep on struggling to do what's best for not only Black kids, but all kids. Keep on keeping on."

THE FUTURE: SUSTAINING THE CONVERSATION, TAKING ACTION, AND PRODUCING RESULTS

Town meeting participants and other residents are already leading the way for change. Both Forward in the Fifth and DRC are supporting local efforts by providing technical assistance and research, publicizing pertinent issues, and integrating the conversations into their future work. County residents are meeting with district administrators, church congregations, and parents to develop specific strategies for overcoming problems of education and race. One group has established an "Expectations Agreement," which aims "to clarify the working relationship between the Democracy Resource Center (DRC) and community people working on issues of racism in the schools (in the county)."

Forward in the Fifth notes that residents are investing considerable time and energy to improve the racial climate and educational outcomes in their communities. In Kentucky, the public conversations have led organizers to begin:

- Empowering county residents to take action to reach their goals.
- Improving communication between schools and the community.
- Changing how schools address the academic needs of all students.

BEREA, KY

Buffalo, New York

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Education Fund for Greater Buffalo*

Formed in March of 1998, the Education Fund for Greater Buffalo implements strategies to initiate school reform and help students with their social and academic needs by promoting strong relationships among schools, districts, and social service agencies.

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Community Conversations on Education and Race*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

Ranked as one of America's most racially segregated cities in a University of Michigan study, Buffalo continually struggles with segregated housing patterns and racial tension over resources, politics, and schools. Fragmented neighborhoods in its urban center suffer high rates of poverty and economic decay, leaving significant numbers of school-age children – over 80% – eligible for free-or reduced-priced lunch. While schools across the county average a student enrollment three-quarters White, Buffalo's public schools are starkly different. The urban district's 46,000 students are 54% African-American, 33% White, 8% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Criticized for some time, Buffalo's city schools contend with a widening racial achievement gap and eroding public support. Highly publicized divisiveness between school board members and a district superintendent has further undermined community support of schools. Unrest extends beyond the city to suburban schools, which also confront issues of race, equity, and student achievement. Increases in state standards have raised the bar for all students. With only 23% of students in Buffalo performing at the new levels and 44% across the county, concern about area schools – especially under-performing schools – is at an all-time high.

Though recently formed, the Education Fund saw an urgent need to address its escalating local issues and it turned to PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative for answers.

WWW.EFGB.ORG

LOCAL PARTNERS: SHARING THE WORK

The Education Fund recruited three types of partners to perform the range of functions required for its community conversations.

Technical partners:

WNED/Channel 17, a public television and radio station, publicized the conversations and the results.

Mitchell, DeTine and Neiler, a public relations firm, prepared press releases and engaged the media.

The Center for Regional Governance at the University of Buffalo provided performance data from its task forces on equity and education.

Roll Call Against Racism, a faith-based coalition, brought its extensive experience with Study Circles.

National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), an anti-racism group, assisted in planning public forums based on experience from its National Summit.

School Partners:

Buffalo Public Schools, an urban district, promoted conversations and provided meeting space.

Board of Cooperative Education Studies solicited participants from the suburbs and county districts.

Constituent Partners:

A broad range of organizations promoted the conversations among their members and constituents, recruited participants, and hosted conversations. These partners include:

New York State United Teachers (the state's largest teachers union), *Erie County Association of School Boards, The United Way, United Neighborhoods* (a service agency for over 500 block clubs), *VOICE* (a faith-based group), and eight parent organizations.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES – STATING THE PURPOSE

Buffalo set four main goals for its project:

- To increase mutual understanding and respect for people's experience
- To create consensus around expectations for both children and adults (toward high achievement)
- To create a set of solutions for local issues around education and race
- To create an environment where the community and the Fund can take action on these issues

PLANNING PROCESS – SETTING THE STAGE

Education Fund project coordinator Dr. Adrianne Christmas held primary responsibility for planning the project while relying on local partners for community outreach. "Education was a heavy topic at the time of the conversations," states Christmas. As a result, the Education Fund looked for a model that was compatible with Buffalo's political climate.

The Fund decided on using the Public Agenda model within a Study Circles framework. A partner, the Roll Call Against Racism Coalition, developed the Study Circles curriculum by integrating the Study Circles Resource Center Model. Organizers believed in-depth discussion – four two-hour Study Circles – was necessary given concerns over the community's racial tension. A town meeting format was planned for a large culminating event.

The Education Fund launched a broad public awareness campaign to publicize the conversations and recruit participants. The Fund produced letters and flyers and circulated them across the city using its exhaustive list of partners: local nonprofit organizations, community centers, churches, schools, and youth groups. A partnering public relations firm and media sent press releases and aired announcements on local radio and television stations. The pool of 54 moderators, most with counseling backgrounds and past experience with study circles, also recruited participants.

"Relationships are critical," says Christmas. As a new LEF, the Education Fund had not established many of the relationships that are essential for collaboration. In planning the conversations, she says local partners "were seasoned and experienced in this type of work."

THE FACTS: GATHERING AND SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

Organizers found collecting local data disaggregated by race was more difficult than expected. A desegregation ruling led some districts to bar the release of recent student data. Efforts to collect data were also met with resistance from school staff. It seems some educators felt threatened by the idea of public discussions about student achievement, fearing they might be held accountable for inequities and their jobs might be at stake. With assistance from an area university and its partners, the Education Fund eventually collected some disaggregated student data but admits it was limited.

Collecting national data was easier. Organizers used research from the Education Trust and the Census Bureau to offer a baseline of information for conversations. They also used education research and newspaper articles provided by a local reporter.

Although they did not present as much data as hoped, organizers found it useful during conversations and report participants – especially parents – were shocked by the low achievement rates.

CONVERSATION MODELS

TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK
8 group sessions
67 participants (total)
Various meeting locations across the greater metropolitan area

STUDY CIRCLES
8 study circles
1 culminating town meeting
Groups ranged from 5 to 17 participants

THE CONVERSATIONS: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Conversations took place across the greater Buffalo area, in a variety of settings and with a broad range of constituents. Although the sessions drew fewer participants than expected, those who came reflected the ethnic and political diversity of the region and included urban and suburban residents. Students, many of them members of a Boys and Girls Club, and groups of grandparents played significant roles as conversation participants. In some cases students moderated discussions with their peers.

Although it is sometimes hard to tell why some forums are well attended and others not, one organizer in Buffalo said she thought parents' voices were absent from some discussions. "Local issues pulled parents away from conversations," reports Christmas. "Many parents have given up on public schools." Christmas says, referring to some of the parents she and others contacted and who declined to participate.

During a series of four study circles, two facilitators, each a different race, led conversations using the national findings from Public Agenda's *Time to Move On*. The sessions were structured as follows:

- **1ST SESSION:** Introductions, presentation of student data and discussion of the first two Public Agenda findings
- **2ND SESSION:** Three school viewpoints from the Town Meeting Framework and more student data
- **3RD SESSION:** Discussion of final two findings and brainstorming
- **4TH SESSION:** Development of action plan

In the study circles format, Christmas reports that trust between facilitators and participants and among participants developed over time. The progressive sessions worked well for participants who needed time to air their concerns, reflect on new information, and voice their ideas for solutions. Christmas believes "the smaller the group,

the more intimate the conversations – the more intimate the conversations, the more honest." In some sessions, "People were cordial, but not really open," she observes. She also notes that "socioeconomic status" was often discussed in lieu of race, but in sessions with a majority of racial minorities, discussions of race were more open.

Topics, themes, findings

Study circles and town meetings yielded several issues:

- Lack of parent involvement in schools
- Parents feeling isolated, powerless, and unwanted as decision makers in schools
- Lack of qualified and caring teachers
- Need to work with parents and their children inside and outside of the schools
- Racial prejudice and discriminatory practices by teachers, students, and administrators
- Lack of suitable school resources for high student achievement

Community voices – a study circle participant

S.T. Jones, a college and career advisor for an after-school program, participated in one of Buffalo's study circles because of a personal invitation from an organizer. She saw relevance in the conversations and her work on urban education issues.

"In Buffalo, the gap is widening between those with influence and those without it. Students with potential often end up at schools that don't challenge them," says Jones. She believes communities should "spread the wealth" so that all schools can offer the same opportunities to students.

Jones found the opportunity to learn more about student achievement and school practices the most meaningful part of her involvement. She laments that more parents did not participate. "There's a huge information gap between those in education and those outside of education. Parents and the community should know more about schools and student performance. Parents often complain, but many do not participate in events like this."

Jones was particularly impressed with the organization of the study circle sessions. "There was good information and outcomes, everyone achieved what they set out to accomplish. And, they were good at keeping things on track." Her advice to other communities, "Find a way to get parents involved."

THE FUTURE: SUSTAINING THE CONVERSATION, TAKING ACTION, AND PRODUCING RESULTS

Believing changes in Buffalo are overdue, the Education Fund sees its conversations as paving the way for change. The Fund has discovered new partners and is introducing strategies focused on family involvement and support for youth to improve its public schools. Buffalo's plans include:

- Holding a youth initiative to address the issues students raised, including a lack of adult support, the need for afterschool programs with academic components, and the need for community partnerships.
- Making educational standards understandable and accessible at the grassroots level.
- Integrating "lessons learned" from PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative into future initiatives.

Denver, Colorado

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC)*

The Public Education and Business Coalition, founded in 1981, promotes academic excellence and success for students and professional excellence among educators in Denver's public schools and communities. Its work is driven by the vision that "All public school students will achieve rigorous academic standards and will complete high school well prepared for post-secondary options and for life in a diverse world."

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Collaborations on Educational Reform*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

"Denver is a tale of two cities." This is how organizers in Denver describe the current climate in their city. Despite a thriving city economy, many communities suffer from high rates of poverty. The "westside," a predominantly Latino community in the inner city, and northeast Denver, an area of historically African-American neighborhoods, are two such communities. Public school students in these communities are predominantly Latino and African-American, and well over half are eligible for free – and reduced-priced lunches.

The litany of issues confronting Denver residents and school administrators is a familiar one. Schools are braving a widening achievement gap between the poor and affluent and between White students and those of color, a dramatic shift in demographics after ending 20 years of court-ordered busing, a move to higher academic standards, a populace alienated by language and socioeconomic status, and an increase in fears about safety and violence.

Raising the achievement levels of Denver's 67,000 students – despite community challenges – is at the core of PEBC's work. Already involved in a collaborative Ford Foundation-funded initiative, it saw the conversations on race as perfectly aligned to local efforts already underway.

WWW.PEBC.ORG

LOCAL PARTNERS: SHARING THE WORK

PEBC found PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative an ideal resource for building strategic community alliances. The local partners included the following:

Denver Education Network, an established Urban Partnership Project, brought the resources of 17 inner city schools, three colleges, and numerous community groups and businesses.

Metropolitan State College, an urban, four-year institution, convened statewide higher education institutions that provide pre-service professional development for teachers.

Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA), a national, community-based policy and technical assistance organization, coordinated plans for the conversations and provided access to significant numbers of Latino and Hispanic residents.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, a national network of school reform advocates, lent its knowledge and resources on standards.

Latino Campaign for Education, local community advocates, co-hosted conversations.

Denver Public Schools assigned key administrators to participate in the planning process.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: STATING THE PURPOSE

The Public Education and Business Coalition's purpose for conversations was to:

- Engage community participants in discussions about standards
- Examine why minority children struggle to achieve the standards
- Explore ways for the community and schools to share responsibility in ensuring that all children meet the standards

PLANNING PROCESS: SETTING THE STAGE

Bridging concurrent initiatives, PEBC's planning committee involved individuals and organizations already working in the targeted schools and neighborhoods. Among the committee members were teacher liaisons from nine schools and representatives from the Cross City Campaign, Casey Foundation-funded neighborhood initiatives, Ford Foundation-funded education reform initiatives, and the Denver Foundation.

The Coalition researched several public engagement models – from Study Circles and the Annenberg Institute – before deciding to use both the Town Meeting Framework and the Education Trust's *Standards in Practice*. Using two models required training for two sets of moderators. Organizers decided to pay stipends to ensure a pool of dedicated and well-trained community members who would serve as moderators for the conversations.

Coalition project director Jan Meck estimates that organizers spent three months on the initial planning, two months on organizing the events and recruiting participants, and then two months training moderators and holding conversations. The planning process required more staff time and more money than expected. "We learned about true community organizing. We underestimated the resources required, but we tapped partners that were experienced organizers, like LARASA," says Meck.

THE FACTS: GATHERING AND SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

Disaggregated student data was readily available in Denver. Organizers used school-by-school student data, disaggregated by ethnicity, to help parents understand where their children stand when compared with other students of the same grade within the school and school district.

During the planning stage, organizers questioned how to present data revealing achievement gaps with sensitivity and relevance. For example, should such data be introduced early on or brought out as parents begin to ask how their children compare with other ethnic groups? They decided to send materials in advance of conversations so that participants would have time to thoroughly review the data before the sessions.

The Education Trust provided national research on racial achievement gaps and disparities in students' taking advanced rigorous curriculum and in vocational education programs. To complement the data, organizers invited parents and educators from a school in Pueblo, Colorado, where students had made phenomenal gains in achievement. The school, with a student profile similar to Denver's, had moved its students from 13% proficiency to 87% proficiency in three years. The presenters from Pueblo offered real-life examples of how a community with significant numbers of poor and minority children used rigorous standards and the Standards in Practice model to improve the academic performance of their students.

THE CONVERSATIONS: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

The first conversation used *Standards in Practice* during a full Saturday session. An Education Trust consultant presented a "train-the-trainer" workshop on the use of the model. Parent liaisons from the planning committee recruited parent/teacher teams of three to five members to attend the workshop and serve as leaders for subsequent conversations. Thirty-nine participated in the workshop and will go on to lead other sessions.

The Education Trust presenter used student work, data, and testimonies from parents and educators to educate participants about standards. Coalition organizers commented on the "powerful" national data, knowledgeable presenters, and helpful materials.

The second conversation, a Public Agenda "town meeting" at a community center, was held on a Tuesday evening. The group of 79 participants was racially diverse and represented local stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, principals, school board members, community activists, and senior citizens.

The public engagement models used in Denver each served a distinct purpose. Together, the two models helped raise public awareness about what factors might affect expectations and academic outcomes. "The Public Agenda model relies heavily on the moderators to probe and tease out subtleties related to race. You lose a lot if you don't have good moderators," says an organizer from Denver. The Education Trust model focuses on school data, educational standards, and student work. It engages participants around these issues to map plans and improve student performance.

For both sessions, PEBC and its partners took great care to draw strong participation and bridge potential communication gaps. Organizers served breakfast and lunch, provided childcare, used Spanish interpreters, and provided Spanish translations of materials.

Working with LARASA was a critical decision. "The conversations established a real partnership for our future work," says Meck. She notes that their joint work is producing deeper relationships in communities and having a significant impact on the LEF's programming and outreach.

CONVERSATION MODELS

TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK
1 town meeting
79 participants
A neighborhood community center
October 1999

STANDARDS IN PRACTICE
1 school-based session
39 participants
West High School
September 1999

Topics, themes, findings

Conversations provided a rare opportunity for parents and other community members to discuss barriers and issues in education. Among the issues raised were:

- Role of standards in student achievement
- Significant role of understandable and meaningful student data
- Questions about grade inflation, curriculum dilution, and low expectations
- Need to build a "critical mass" of engaged and knowledgable parents and teachers

- Language as a barrier to high student achievement
- Challenges and benefits of bilingual education
- Need for more bilingual communication with parents
- Importance of parents in the standards movement
- Need for parent-teacher partnerships in student learning and advocacy for standards and higher expectations

Some groups acknowledged culture as a potential factor in student achievement. For example, some Latino parents are reluctant to question authority, and therefore do not challenge teachers and school administrators when it comes to their children's academic performance. Organizers report that participants believe the school and community must address these cultural barriers.

Overall, organizers found that during discussions the participants probed deeply and wanted to take on the tough issues. They offered no excuses such as mobility, race, economics, or language for low academic achievement. "They are willing to get in the trenches with their kids if they'll do better," says Meck. "It was apparent that standards offer a solution."

Community voices – a project coordinator

Jan Meck, the project coordinator in Denver says, "When we started I was anxious to get to the conversations and get to answers. But true public engagement percolates up. You can't impose conversation on people – it takes time. I realize that the process is essential to reaching the goal."

The aftermath of the shootings at Colorado's Columbine High School, a pending school board election, and newspaper headlines about gaps in student performance had catapulted education to the forefront at the time of Denver's conversations. Given the heated climate, Meck says that organizers decided not to promote conversations with the media. She says that they did not want to attract only the "activists," but rather "wanted the quiet voices for the first phase." Some residents do not feel comfortable talking at highly-publicized events. As an alternative to the media, organizers cultivated one-on-one relationships in communities. Using these connections for word-of-mouth communication, they encouraged participation in the public forums.

THE FUTURE: SUSTAINING CONVERSATIONS, TAKING ACTION, AND PRODUCING RESULTS

Troubled neighborhoods and schools in Denver are attracting considerable local and national resources to improve conditions for residents and students. PEBC and its partners are using their relationships and experiences from the conversations to bridge these parallel efforts and strengthen the work underway.

Meck says, "The momentum is the most exciting thing." Denver's plans for the future include:

- Expanding *Standards and Practice* sessions and multiplying the cadre of local advocates for high standards: parents will train parents and teachers will train teachers.
- Continuing the work begun by the conversations under PEBC's *Collaborating for Educational Reform Initiative*, which is funded by a two-year Ford Foundation grant.
- Collaborating with LARASA on policy issues and on public engagement.
- Partnering with organizers from an Annie E. Casey Foundation's neighborhood initiative on education projects.

Grand Rapids, Michigan

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Partners in Public Education (PPE)*

Established in 1986, Partners in Public Education envisions a strong Grand Rapids community and seeks to raise student achievement levels in public schools by engaging the community in strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with schools.

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Grand Rapids Citizen Circles on Race and Education*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

While the City of Grand Rapids and neighboring suburbs experience an economic boom, considerable numbers of the city's minorities and poor live in isolation. Unable to tap the rapidly expanding job market, minorities in Grand Rapids are three times more likely to be poor than are White residents. And despite some progress, housing patterns remain segregated by race and economics.

Closely linked to the economic gap is the gap in student achievement. One of three African-American county residents does not have a high school diploma, less than 10 percent have bachelor's degrees and fewer than a thousand have graduate degrees. Public confidence in Grand Rapids Public Schools has hit an all-time low. Disproportionate numbers of minority and low-income students have teachers who expect too little of them, attend outdated and decaying schools, and have limited access to technology. They also are twice as likely to be placed in special education programs as compared to their White classmates.

Bearing witness to race riots, 30 years of insufficient "opportunity measures," and persistent racial gaps, several groups in Grand Rapids are aggressively taking action to bring about real change. They recognize that these disparities threaten the area's prosperity and that improving education is a primary strategy to eliminate the existing gaps. Building on concurrent local efforts and its own work, PPE seized the opportunity to more closely examine the effects of race and racism on student achievement.

WWW.GRPPE.ORG

Partners
Advocates for
Student
Achievement

LOCAL PARTNERS: SHARING THE WORK

Guided by a set of characteristics for successful partnerships, PPE selected two local partners.

Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism (GRACE) / Racial Justice Institute, a religious, nonprofit organization, brought expertise from its prior work against racism.

Employer Coalition for Healing Racism, formed by a local CEO and the chamber of commerce, delivered a cadre of experienced moderators and access to policy groups.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: STATING THE PURPOSE

By convening thirty broad-based *Citizen Circles*, PPE set out to research and understand the racial gap in student achievement. Its aim was to allow citizens to:

- Explore student achievement data and other data from schools
- Form consensus on the factors that contribute to the student achievement gap
- Create recommendations for actions necessary to close the gap
- Establish annual goals or targets for reduction measured by educational performance and system performance
- Report progress toward reducing the achievement gap to the larger community

PLANNING PROCESS: SETTING THE STAGE

PPE project director Karen Ward had the primary responsibility for the project, while a planning committee of partners supported the overall work. The committee decided to integrate the Study Circles model with the Town Meeting Framework by discussing issues in a series of four "citizen circles." Thirty-six moderators, most of whom were experienced in leading group discussions on race, received a full day of Public Agenda training. PPE assigned one White and one minority moderator to each circle, deeming bi-racial co-facilitation an effective measure for its public discussions on race.

Advance coordination of logistics helped moderators carry out effective and efficient meetings. For example, PPE set up agreements with local restaurants to cater the Study Circle Sessions. Moderators ordered food by phone before sessions, meals were delivered to meeting locations, and bills were sent directly to PPE.

Participants were recruited through mailings and a media campaign including radio interviews, mid-day television shows, and articles in organizational newsletters and local newspapers.

THE FACTS: GATHERING AND SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

There was a deliberate use of data to provide participants with objective information for discussion and to offer a baseline for measuring progress over time. To collect data, organizers contacted local superintendents and three of them agreed to release district data disaggregated by race, with the understanding that data would not be used to compare one district to another.

During sessions, participants received an introductory data sheet followed by bar graphs of cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) and by state assessment scores of 11th graders. Receiving only a snapshot of student performance and achievement gaps, some participants expressed interest in receiving more data.

THE CONVERSATIONS: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Residents have been engaged in two years of community dialogue on race including annual "race summits" and

CONVERSATION MODELS

STUDY CIRCLES INTEGRATED WITH TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK
15 citizen circles
115 participants (total)
Sites across the city
August – October 1999

leadership conferences on racism. Building on those discussions, PPE and its partners designed a sustainable model reflecting past and ongoing local efforts to explore race relations. As one organizer put it, "The climate in Grand Rapids set the stage for robust discussion."

The Grand Rapids *Citizen Circles* curriculum combined the Study Circles model and Public Agenda's framework. The adapted model included four two-hour sessions, each with a specific objective.

1ST SESSION: Getting to know one another
2ND SESSION: Discussing issues guided by Public Agenda's framework and video
3RD SESSION: Examining local student data, comparing scores, and analyzing the achievement gap
4TH SESSION: Identifying action steps to reduce the achievement gap

Asking for full commitment, PPE recruited 115 participants using the extensive networks of partners and a variety of other community groups. Fifteen circles, made up of seven to ten participants, convened at meeting locations across the city and at various times. Some circles even attracted participants from outlying communities 20 to 30 miles away.

The circles generated rich discussion among a diverse pool of participants. "Dynamics of groups were positive, because they were small," believes one organizer. "The circles provided an opportunity for people to meet others they may not have met otherwise." One group has decided to continue group discussions on their own.

An elected official who served as a moderator remarked, "Being a city commissioner in Grand Rapids for so many years, I thought I knew a lot of people. I was quite surprised that I only recognized two people in my circle. It gave me a whole new perspective – that's good."

Topics, themes, findings

In Grand Rapids, the citizen circles permitted residents to voice their opinions and solutions on a broad range of issues. Among the topics were:

- Gaps in student achievement based on race
- Role of poverty and single-parent homes on low student performance
- Low expectations for minority and poor students
- Need for increased expectations, rigorous standards, and parental and community involvement
- Need to integrate diversity and sensitivity training into staff development programs

Community voices – a facilitator

Carole Morgan Williams runs a pre-college program targeting African-American high school students in Grand Rapids. A past PPE volunteer, Williams became interested in participating in the education and race conversations upon hearing about the initiative. After facilitating a series of citizen circles, she says the most meaningful aspect was "the warm fuzzy feeling from having people talk about such an important topic."

Serving as one of two co-facilitators assigned to circles, Williams believes the bi-racial pairings work well for diverse group discussions. "Everybody needs somebody there that they identify with," says Williams. The facilitators took turns leading sessions and recording the conversation notes. She found that Grand Rapids' conversation model took a "subtle" approach to the subject of race, which required probing and "finessing" by facilitators. Race was often "alluded to" in the presentations and materials, but she believes that more "upfront" discussions of race are needed. She notes, however, that there was a risk some "people may have been frightened off... (if they felt the topic was) too provocative and too deep."

Williams noted different perceptions and understanding of issues based on the race of participants. During sessions she says, "lights went on for Whites" and sometimes "anger came out in Black participants." Circle members carefully listened to the views of participants. People are "tired of dealing with symptoms," observes Williams. "They're anxious to deal with root causes."

THE FUTURE: TAKING ACTION, PRODUCING RESULTS, AND SUSTAINING THE CONVERSATION

After the discussion circles ended, an advisory group – made up of 24 moderators and participants – reported recommendations for action from their group. The recommendations are similar and there is strong interest in taking action to close the achievement gap. Among the recommendations are raising expectations for all students, setting rigorous academic standards, increasing parent involvement, requiring accountability from educators, and promoting cultural sensitivity.

PPE and its partners are seeking ways to integrate the recommendations and other outcomes into ongoing local efforts. They are also interested in launching new strategies to bring lasting change in Grand Rapids. Community plans include:

- Presenting recommendations from the Citizen Circles on Race and Education at the Racial Justice Institute held Spring 2000.
- Encouraging conversation participants, including teachers and school administrators, to enroll in ongoing public forums and institutes on education and race.
- Assessing how PPE will incorporate recommendations into its ongoing work in education.
- Releasing progress reports on closing the achievement gap to the community. Reports will track progress using a variety of indicators, such as: implementation of rigorous standards, increased opportunities to learn for all students, rigor of courses being taken by all students, high expectations for all students, higher test scores of minority students, reduced number of minority students referred to special education, increased teacher accountability, increased parent involvement, and business/community organizations actively involved in the schools (work-based learning opportunities).

Hattiesburg, Mississippi

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation (HAEF)*

The mission of the Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation is to promote the importance of public education, engender collaboration among diverse segments of the community, and develop and implement programs that encourage family and citizen involvement in education. Founded in 1986, it generates both private and community support to enhance public education for all children in the greater Hattiesburg area.

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Winning the Race: Student Achievement, Public Understanding*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

The geographic boundaries that separate Forrest and Lamar counties' six school districts are just one of many factors that divide this southeast Mississippi community. As in many southern states, age-old racial divisions persist today. Historic measures to desegregate schools, then a recent shift back to neighborhood schools, have split community interests. Local children attend schools with disparate demographics, varying needs, and vast differences in achievement. The area's schools and districts face the challenge of competing for the limited resources to improve their schools and students' performance.

A 1996 town meeting, part of the nationally heralded *Public Conversations about Public Schools*, brought together Hattiesburg-area citizens to set priorities for local education. The town meeting produced topics participants wanted to address in future conversations, one of which was the role race and socioeconomic status play on student achievement.

Two years later, widening achievement gaps and a district superintendent's resignation turned the public's attention again to issues of education and race. At the center of school reform and public engagement efforts, HAEF saw an opportunity to unite its divided community.

WWW.PUBLICEDUCATION.ORG/ABOUT/MISSISSIPPI.HTM

Hattiesburg Area Education Foundation

LOCAL PARTNERS: SHARING THE WORK

HAEF drew support from two partners and a network of community collaborators to carry out its town meeting in Hattiesburg.

Mission Mississippi, a network of Black and White churches, provided planning committee members and recommended participants.

Mississippi Department of Education linked local organizers to state resources and data about student performance.

Local parent organizations and the public housing authority also were active in planning the town meeting and in recruiting participants.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: STATING THE PURPOSE

HAEF and its partners conducted their community conversations to:

- Identify and gather existing data relevant to student achievement
- Conduct local research that disaggregates achievement data by race
- Increase community awareness, especially among parents, about existing differences in achievement by race among Black and White students
- Conduct local research that compares local perspectives about issues of education and race with the findings from Public Agenda's *Time to Move On*
- Stimulate interest among educational stakeholders, especially parents, in honest exploration and discussion about issues of education and race
- Engage a group of parents from each of HAEF's six districts in honest exploration and dialogue about issues of education and race
- Develop an action plan in each district to address issues of education and race identified through public discussion

PLANNING PROCESS: SETTING THE STAGE

HAEF executive director Sue Van Slyke coordinated plans for the town meeting. A former university president and a senior officer from the state highway patrol co-chaired the planning committee, which included 21 members recommended by superintendents and school administrators from across Hattiesburg's six districts. A significant force on the planning committee was a group of local ministers, particularly those from African-American churches, who played an important role in publicizing the town meeting with their congregations.

Organizers used the Town Meeting Framework for its town meeting. After a day and a half of training by Public Agenda, the twelve moderators held three practice sessions to hone their facilitation skills and engaged in-depth discussions about education and race.

THE FACTS: GATHERING AND SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

HAEF experienced setbacks and "lessons learned" while collecting student data. This delayed the planning efforts for three months. Among the difficulties were the state department of education's lack of data disaggregated by race and its recent change to a new education assessment plan. Organizers learned community-based requests for disaggregated data are virtually unheard of in the department. Organizers were persistent and eventually they obtained disaggregated student achievement data from the state.

Collecting data – even with the hurdles they encountered – helped staff and board members better understand local education issues and appreciate the use of data in empowering parents and community members. In the end, organizers used the data to inform the planning process, but decided against presenting it to the public. They had serious concerns about the data's reliability and relevance, and did not want to confuse or mislead community members. However, they do have plans to publicize school and student data in the future.

Wiser from the experience, Van Slyke states, "a major lesson learned is that the collection and use of data, though

sensitive and sometimes political, is a necessary area of work for LEFs that genuinely have school reform as a goal." She also believes HAEF's efforts may prompt other community groups in the area to request student achievement data, especially data disaggregated by race and socioeconomic status.

THE CONVERSATIONS: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Gathering at a local high school, 76 residents from across the six districts participated in a town meeting focused on student achievement. As participants arrived, the co-chairs warmly greeted and directed them to registration tables and the buffet line. After dinner and the opening session, the audience separated into five groups and moved into classrooms for discussions.

Using the Town Meeting Framework, bi-racial pairs of moderators led five groups in two-hour discussions. Volunteers, designated as "recorders," captured on paper the thoughts and ideas generated by participants and summarized their notes before the audience re-convened. To close the meeting, co-chairs made remarks on the importance of the evening's discussion, thanked residents for participating, asked for completed surveys, and promised a timely distribution of a final report of the results.

Community voices – an involved parent and town meeting participant

Seneca Nicholson is the mother of two young boys and the PTA president for a Hattiesburg elementary school. Nicholson, known for her involvement in schools and the community, learned about the town meeting from another parent. She says, "I like to be involved when I can."

CONVERSATION MODEL

TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK
1 town meeting
76 participants (total)
Hattiesburg High School
August 31, 1999

Nicholson believes the conversations on education and race in Hattiesburg were timely because of local issues, like a newly-hired superintendent, a recent move to neighborhood schools, and ongoing changes in the district. She observed that the town meeting drew a diverse crowd and that she saw lots of new faces, although she believes more Black parents needed to attend. To draw strong participation from parents and residents, she suggests that Hattiesburg and other communities to a use a variety of channels to reach deep into schools and communities, and publicize the conversations among a broader cross-section of people.

During the town meeting, "Everybody got a chance to participate," says Nicholson. Moderators urged everyone to have a say. Nicholson says that this made the town meeting different from other meetings she has attended.

Nicholson is passionate about her children getting the best education possible. She wants schools in Mississippi to be comparable to those elsewhere in the country. She believes the issues of race and racism in education are concrete and obvious to most citizens. She recommends that people drop the "pleasantries" and the "tiptoeing" when discussing education and race and get down to the real issues that will make schools better. She also believes that her community must let go of the past and move forward. She, like other parents, is "trying to do what's in the best interest of the children – Black and White."

Themes, topics, findings

Breakout sessions revealed a significant communication gap between parents and educators. The Public Agenda Town Meeting Framework helped to identify where participants agreed or disagreed on issues.

Areas of Agreement

- The need for accountability in public education
- The lack of high expectations for some students and schools
- The need to deal more openly with race, class, and gender
- Problems with ability grouping among students in the lower grades
- Insufficient transitions from Head Start to elementary school

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Areas of Disagreement

- Educator qualifications (Defining what makes a good teacher and what the minimum qualifications for teachers should be.)
- Ability grouping (Determining whether special programs, such as "gifted student" programs are a good idea. Or, are they harmful because they "label" and segregate children?)
- How to define and measure student success.
- Academic standards (What are standards? How should they be implemented? Ambiguity exists even among educators.)

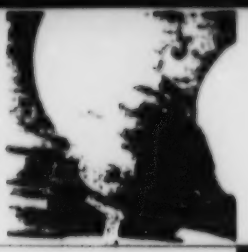
THE FUTURE: SUSTAINING THE CONVERSATION, TAKING ACTION, AND PRODUCING RESULTS

An unexpected outcome was the substantive conversation that emerged among HAEF's 26 board members. Reflecting the local citizenry – parents, educators, employers – and often divided by competing district interests, the board benefited from focused discussion on student achievement and race. Citing the board's new perspective since the conversation, organizers believe their involvement was a public engagement event itself.

Ardent in her support for school reform, Sue Van Slyke sees these national conversations and the important issues they raise as "civil rights work." In Hattiesburg, the conversation participants are emphasizing five issues for follow-up activities:

- Involving students to solve problems related to race and achievement.
- Engaging parents in early childhood development, in schools and in their children's instructional lives.
- Clarifying standards: what are children expected to know and be able to do by specific grades and educational levels?
- Improving communication across or among home, community, and schools.
- Examining (through continued discussions) the influence of racial and socioeconomic factors on student performance.

HATTIESBURG, MS



Oakland, California

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute*

Named after an Oakland school superintendent, the Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute evolved from a 1973 initiative – one of the first of its kind – to unite educators, parents, business, and civic leaders in efforts to reform public education. For 25 years the Institute has worked for and with a multicultural community to address the broad range of educational needs.

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Dialogue on Race in Education*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

The 1996 "Ebonics" controversy thrust Oakland's public schools into the national spotlight and fueled discussions about education and race. However judged, Oakland's search for a solution to alarmingly low student performance represents a pressing concern in many cities.

The Oakland Unified School District has 53,320 students who come from very diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The demographic breakdown is 51 percent African-American, 22.8 percent Latino/Hispanic, 17.5 percent Asian American, 6 percent European American, >1 percent Filipino American, >1 percent Pacific Islander, and >.5 percent Native American.

Ahead of the curve, California's recent shifts in student demographics, including an influx of Spanish speaking students, characterize the changes occurring in school districts around the country. Consequently, Oakland is keenly aware that the concept of race must extend beyond traditional and historical constructs – Black and White – to include other groups as well. Lagging in this trend is the racial composition of Oakland's school personnel – and this concerns some residents. While students represent a broad cultural spectrum, the teaching staff is increasingly White and administrative personnel include few Latinos and Asian Americans.

Racially diverse and fragmented, Oakland's schools are embroiled in the racial unrest – and sometimes violence – of its students. Troubled by the discord, the Institute believed in-depth conversations about school discipline and safety, inclusive curricula, and school staff could create cross-cultural understanding and a collaborative plan for action.

WWW.MAFEI.ORG

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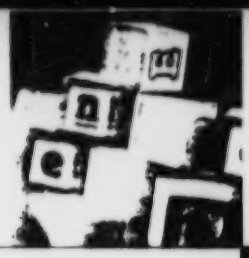
SUMMARY OF MODIFIED CONVERSATIONS

Local political conflict and scheduling difficulties led organizers in Oakland to modify their initial plans for multiple, broad-based town meetings and conversations. As a result, they held three smaller sets of conversations at a local meeting hall, and one session with the Institute's board of directors. Additional public conversations are being planned. "Race has a whole other meaning in Oakland," says Dr. Julie Henderson, the Institute's executive director. "Strained race relations in the community have filtered down to the kids."

A sociology professor from California State University at Hayward, who specializes in issues of race and diversity, facilitated sessions. Drawing attendance from students, teachers, parents and other community residents, the sessions' participants reflected Oakland's rich ethnic diversity. Vietnamese, Cantonese and Spanish interpreters, recruited by the Institute, assisted participants who were non-native English speakers. During conversations, students and adults spoke freely and were very clear about their concerns, which included the achievement gap, the need for better school resources and infrastructure, and concern for the future direction of public schools in Oakland.

Henderson recommends that other communities allow sufficient time to respond to unforeseen occurrences that could delay plans for conversations. She says it is important to keep an open mind while planning conversations. "Have anticipated outcomes, but be open to see and hear things that you didn't know were out there," advises Henderson.

OAKLAND, CA



Paterson, New Jersey

LOCAL EDUCATION FUND: *Paterson Education Fund (PEF)*

A founding member of PEN since 1983, the Paterson Education Fund emphasizes community-school linkages, whole-school change, and professional development. Its mission is to stimulate community action for change so the Paterson Public Schools ensure that all their children achieve high standards.

LOCAL PROJECT TITLE: *Lift Every Voice / Levante Cada Voz*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION SITE

As New Jersey's third largest city, Paterson's population of 150,000 is a diverse mélange of residents, many of whom are immigrants representing more than 50 ethnic groups and languages. Plagued by high rates of poverty and unemployment, city residents, community leaders, and educators struggle to end these destructive influences.

The public schools reflect the city's troubles. In 1991, the state took control of schools after decades of failure and mismanagement. A state lawsuit also drew attention to school finance and equity issues and under the court decision, schools must implement site-based management and whole-school reform models. Presenting another challenge are rigorous new content standards that have raised concern about children in Paterson being prepared to meet them.

State-released reports have documented the impact of race, mobility, poverty, and family background on the academic performance of local students. Paterson schools enroll 24,000 students with a racial mix of 51 percent Hispanic, 43 percent African-American, 4 percent White, and others who are mostly Arabic. Some residents worry that teachers and school staff – largely White and residing in the suburbs – are failing to meet the needs of their racially and culturally diverse students.

Recognizing a connection between its work in standards and PEN and Public Agenda's Education and Race Initiative, PEF set out to examine the impact of race on student achievement. "Paterson children will not achieve high standards unless the professional staff believes that every child, regardless of race, is capable of achieving high standards," organizers assert.

WWW.PATERSON-EDUCATION.ORG

Paterson EDUCATION Fund

LOCAL PARTNERS: SHARING THE WORK

Building on new and established partnerships, PEF engaged its grassroots community in public conversations on education and race.

Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC) – Paterson Affiliate, offered leadership from area ministers and linkages to congregations.

Aspira Inc. of New Jersey, part of a national Hispanic association, brought resources to involve the city's growing Spanish-speaking population, especially parents.

Paterson Public Schools, an urban school district, provided student performance data.

Other partners included: *City of Paterson, Barnert Hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital, Paterson Free Public Library*, area museums, and other non-partisan community organizations.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: STATING THE PURPOSE

In concert with partners, PEF created its initiative to:

- Develop a national conversation model to encourage deep exploration of issues concerning education and race
- Provide an opportunity for the Paterson community, particularly those people who are regularly excluded from public dialogue, to examine the impact of race on education and student achievement
- Identify specific challenges that impact student achievement gaps among different racial and ethnic groups
- Advocate continued conversation and community action to move all students to acceptable levels of student achievement

PLANNING PROCESS: SETTING THE STAGE

Cited in the Annenberg Institute's *Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change*, PEF is experienced in public engagement. With *Lift Every Voice*, it set out to cultivate a diverse, new cadre of advocates who could expand the initial conversations to the broader community. Preparing for nine months, the two-member staff, eight planning committee members, 25 steering committee members, and 10 facilitators carefully laid the foundation for conversations to ensure deep and thoughtful discussion. Organizers participated in racism training after learning that only half of them had ever discussed race in a mixed-race setting. They believed the project's leadership should have explored the topic of race among themselves before promoting similar discussions with the public.

The organizers made a deliberate effort to go beyond the "usual suspects" – organizational leaders who are frequently tapped for city initiatives – to residents not generally heard from in public discourse. Using an "asset mapping" activity to identify both steering committee members and participants, organizers invited people they knew personally and those with a genuine interest in the role of race in education. They also took measures to ensure a balance of race, ethnicity, gender, profession, and economic status among invitees. As an added measure, they called or met with each prospective participant.

The planning committee elected to hold an initial town meeting – using the Town Meeting Framework – followed by a series of in-depth "fishbowl" conversations. For several years, PEF has used fishbowl conversations, adapted from the Kiva model, to engage teachers, parents, and school board candidates in discussions about education. Finding the format effective, even with difficult topics, PEF decided to use "fishbowls" to examine student data and to probe issues from the town meeting. Organizers found this two-tier approach important for its residents, because it allowed for ongoing, deep discussions about local multiracial and multiethnic issues.

THE FACTS: GATHERING AND SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

Comprehensive reports on achievement – containing extensive school and student data disaggregated by race – were obtained from the independent auditors of the state takeover, Arthur Andersen. The steering committee decided to present achievement data from 4th, 8th and 11th grade assessments. They found line charts effective in illustrating results and examining disparities.

Paterson did not collect national data, but used the U.S. Department of Education's "Education and Race Fact Sheet" to frame the national issue and introduce local data. The fishbowl conversations centered on student data and test results.

THE CONVERSATIONS: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

The town meeting followed the protocol developed by Public Agenda. Sixty residents – including significant numbers of parents and reflecting the community's racial and ethnic diversity – participated in the conversations.

The moderators demonstrated the importance of their role during the small-group sessions. Organizers report that their moderators proved to be strong leaders by keeping the discussions flowing smoothly and probing issues of race and achievement among participants. In one group, a moderator successfully maintained focus and order among members despite a combative member's efforts to disrupt the discussion.

Later, a series of three public forums were held using the fishbowl format. To accommodate the schedules of educators, parents, and community members, two sets of forums were organized. Educators, who preferred to meet right after school, mainly attended the series of forums that were held from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Parents and community members generally attended the forums from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. During each set of forums, moderators led discussions that addressed critical questions.

FORUM ONE: What data do we have? What data is missing? Is the missing data available? How do we need to disaggregate the data?

FORUM TWO: HOW were the missing data gathered? What do we learn from the new data? What assets do we have or need to make a difference in the data?

FORUM THREE: What resources and people do we have to move our students to higher achievement? What is our action plan?

These questions were addressed during fishbowl conversations. The model required six speakers and a moderator to sit in an inner circle with two empty seats, while listeners sat in an outer circle. Only people seated in the inner circle could speak. By moving to one of the empty inner chairs, listeners were allowed to join the conversation to ask clarifying questions. Midway through the discussion, participants rotated. PEF finds that the format forces each participant to listen to what is being said by the speaker, rather than engage in verbal sparring.

Topics, themes, findings

The following issues surfaced during the town meeting and fishbowl conversations:

- Paterson children are not meeting high standards and residents know they can.
- The community needs to talk more about race, ethnicity, and diversity, and how their attitudes and expectations affect learning and performance.
- Paterson's successful schools can help others by sharing their "lessons learned" and strategies for success.
- Schools lack sufficient supplies, materials, and other resources. The school community needs budget development training. Their lack of knowledge limits the implementation of whole-school reform mandates.
- Schools and communities must work together and hold each other mutually accountable for student achievement.

CONVERSATION MODELS

TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK
1 town meeting
59 participants
Paterson Museum
May 20, 1999

FISHBOWLS
Two sets of three forums
61 – 90 participants per forum
Local community college and museum
May – September 1999

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Organizers report that, at first, it seemed people did not want to discuss race directly. Instead they often used code words, like "inner city kids" and "poor children" which given school demographics alluded to specific racial groups. Participants also skirted the stark racial differences between students and teachers, by vaguely referring to the "make-up of students and teachers" and asking if the school staff was "reflective" of the student body. By the last conversations, participants were explicit and race was specifically identified as an issue. Apparently it took time for people to feel comfortable enough with one another and to confront the issue of race in a straightforward manner.

"Make sure that the group is diverse. It's very, very critical that people hear different voices," advises Rosie Grant, PEF project director.

Community voices – an LEF board member

Dedicated to issues of race, fairness and justice, Reverend Doug Maven serves on the PEF board of directors and is a member of the Congress of National Black Churches–Paterson Affiliate. Rev. Maven participated in *Lift Every Voice / Levante Cada Voz* by chairing the steering committee.

"PEF took on the project because local students were not doing well. People were constantly asking, 'Is race having an impact? If so, how? And why?' It was legitimate questioning," explains Maven.

He emphasized the committee's desire to bring participants to the table "without their professional hats, but as concerned citizens." Their efforts paid off. "The diversity of the people involved in the conversations," Maven believes was most meaningful. "Some say Paterson has 53 different ethnic groups. They all weren't there, but there were enough to create a multicultural environment and to present multi-issues. There were different levels represented from college professors to single moms, from the well-to-do to those on public assistance. To have everyone equal at the table was very powerful."

Maven's advice to others: "Remain open to how people want to be engaged in the conversation. Don't be heavy-handed on topics. People shouldn't see it was a routine, the conversations should be fluid."

THE FUTURE: SUSTAINING CONVERSATIONS, TAKING ACTION, AND PRODUCING RESULTS

"We've seen personal change and institutional change," reports Grant. She is encouraged by the philosophical metamorphosis that has taken place among school board members, educators, parents, organizers, and other participants as a result of Paterson's conversations.

There's a "genuine interest in the issue…in digging deeper and in examining test data," says Maven. The community is excited about continuing the conversations.

To capture the views and recommendations of conversation participants, PEF produced and distributed a report, entitled "Does Student Achievement Have Color." Mailed to 2,000 of Paterson's residents, the report contains an action plan addressing issues of concern. PEF also is preparing to present their findings to community groups.

Among the actions steps planned in Paterson are:

- Publishing, and widely distributing, data on student achievement, dropout rates, and graduation rates (disaggregated by race and ethnicity and by school.)
- Publishing demographic data about teachers, support staff, central office staff, principals, children, parents, and the community. Taking proactive measures to combat racism and classism in education.
- Integrating an inclusive curriculum that reflects the diverse cultures, histories, and achievements of various groups to raise ethnic pride and self-worth among all students.
- Sharing successful strategies among schools and community groups that sponsor education enrichment programs.
- Educating school staff, parents, and community members on how to allocate school funds to ensure adequate budgets for materials, school personnel, professional development (especially in cultural diversity), and other resources.
- Defining "accountability" to generate consensus among constituencies and to foster collaboration between those inside and outside of schools.

Tools and Lessons Learned

Getting Started

Planning the Conversation

Researching your Schools and Community

Holding Conversations and Engaging the Public

Publicizing your Project

Evaluating your Work

Moving On

The tools presented in this section are a compilation of those developed and used by PEN, Public Agenda, project sites, and other sources. Some tools work best for specific public engagement models and approaches, while others are designed for more general use. Review the options and select and adapt the ones that best suit your needs.

- SETTING GOALS
- SELECTING PARTNERS
- ESTABLISHING THE PLANNING COMMITTEE
- ASSESSING LOCAL CLIMATE
- ESTABLISHING A TIMELINE
- CREATING A PROJECT BUDGET

SETTING GOALS

It is important to begin your initiative by agreeing on what you hope to accomplish. Under the PEN and Public Agenda initiative the central purpose of the initial dialogue was to open up the topic of education and race in communities in a manner that would inform subsequent efforts at public engagement. Remember the purpose is *not* to resolve all the challenges facing the community's schools in one session. While setting goals it is important to create positive but realistic expectations.

Goals

Goals should be:

- Specific
- Observable (results-oriented)
- Measurable
- Time-limited
- Attainable
- Meaningful
- Supported by stakeholders
- Interdependent
- Prioritized

Public Agenda states that public conversations on education and race should:

- Promote a rich and productive dialogue among a cross-section of the community.
- Help educators become more aware of the community's perceptions, misconceptions, questions, and values.
- Help establish lines of communications to address new issues as they arise.
- Build local capacity to create more, and even better community conversations in the future.
- Explore possible steps, beyond initial conversations, to engage the community at large in ways to improve education.

SELECTING PARTNERS

Partnerships with community, business, and educational organizations are key to achieving your stated goals. It is important to identify organizations that will complement your organization's resources and experience and then establish clear roles and responsibilities for those involved.

Assess the suitability of each prospective partner by determining whether the following statements are true.

- The organization's mission supports the goals of the project and is directly aligned with improving student achievement.
- The community perceives the organization as credible, nonpartisan, and valuable.
- The organization is willing to participate and wishes to collaborate with other groups.
- The organization has access to grassroots constituents who are impacted by the project and who can be influential in its success.

TOOL FROM PEBC IN DENVER

GUIDE FOR SELECTING PARTNERS

Choose a partner that:

- Plans carefully, set goals, and measures of progress
- Sets high standards for student learners
- Welcomes outsiders with new ideas
- Shares learning with others
- Sustains activities with existing resources
- Provides organizational leadership
- Involves parents, families, and students the partnership process

■ LESSON LEARNED

SCOPE OF WORK: Don't bite off more than you can reasonably manage. Organizers have found that planning and holding public forums on education and race is labor-intensive. In several cases, organizers decided to scale back from their original plans because they had underestimated the amount of staff time and resources required to carry out a successful forum.

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

ROLES OF PARTNERS

A good partner may:

- Provide outreach to prospective conversation participants
- Serve on planning committees
- Provide expertise on race, ethnicity, language, public engagement, education, or media relations
- Recruit conversation moderators and other volunteers
- Provide logistical support (meeting space, equipment, or transportation)
- Provide matching financial support and in-kind donations
- Help gather relevant data

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Consider partnering with:

- Community-based education advocates (e.g. local education funds)
- Public school districts
- Racial and ethnic advocacy groups (e.g. NAACP, LARASA, ASPIRA, and Urban League)
- Ministerial Associations
- Anti-discrimination organizations
- Parent associations (e.g. PTA, PTO, Parents for Public Schools)
- Colleges and universities
- Businesses
- Hospitals
- Local foundations

ESTABLISHING A PLANNING COMMITTEE

Most organizations create a planning committee to make key decisions and to carry out project activities. The lead organizer, along with its partners, decides who will serve on the committee and then sets out to recruit those individuals. The size of the committee will vary, but many organizations choose between eight and 12 members. Groups also generally elect or appoint a committee chair, who acts as a "champion" for the planned conversations, serves as a spokesperson, and wields clout in recruiting other committee members, participants, and sponsors. In Hattiesburg, organizers appointed co-chairs, each of a different race and representing different segments of the community (e.g., a retired higher education president and a respected community leader).

Select a planning committee made up of people with access to, and credibility with, important and diverse segments of the local population. Look for people with influence among community members who are not typically involved or are frequently excluded from existing local dialogues on education. The committee should be diverse and include the community members and stakeholders who are wanted as conversation participants. In fact, the guidelines for recruiting participants can also apply the selection of planning committee members.

Divide tasks and responsibilities among committee members so no one person or organization bears the sole burden of planning a successful initiative. Sharing the work also creates a sense of ownership in the conversations and will serve organizers well, after the conversations, when taking action.

TOOL FROM PUBLIC AGENDA PLANNING GUIDE

PLANNING COMMITTEE TASKS

This checklist should help you get started. It is not meant to be exclusive of any other activities the planning committee wishes to tackle. Items are listed in chronological order of how to prepare for public conversations. Each task should be completed, or at least begun, before moving on to the next task. More detailed direction on these tasks are covered in the following pages.

- Choose dates for the public conversations on education and race.
- Select the conversation site and make arrangements for food and equipment.
- Select people to serve as moderators and recorders, who will attend training sessions.
- Develop a list of potential participants.
- About four weeks before the conversation, invite participants and observers. Request them to respond at least two weeks before the meeting. Be sure to over-recruit groups that tend to be underrepresented.
- As the date nears, follow up invitations with telephone calls to all participants, especially those who may be difficult to involve, to ensure participation by a true cross-section of the community.
- Keep careful track of who is signing up. Make special efforts to recruit underrepresented categories of participants. Assign confirmed participants to small discussion groups (made up of 8 or up to 15 participants) so each group represents the diversity of the total.
- Decide if media coverage is desired, and if so, call the appropriate publications and stations. Set ground rules for media participation.
- Provide copies of participant guides to confirmed attendees before the conversation and also have them available at the meeting.
- Identify other tasks.

■ LESSON LEARNED

NONPARTISAN CREDIBILITY: It is important that the broader community view partners, sponsors, project leadership, and volunteers as nonpartisan and credible. Some organizations and individuals may not be perceived as such, because of their past and present associations and public stands. It will be easier to attract a diverse range of participants if the public trusts organizers and are not concerned about hidden agendas.

ASSESSING LOCAL CLIMATE

Before conducting conversations on education and race examine the political, educational, and racial climate in the community. A historical occurrence or recent media coverage on an issue or event may impact your plans for public conversations. Such local context could help or hinder planning efforts.

Local Context for Conversations

Find out how these or other community issues could affect conversations on education and race

- Publication of student's standardized test scores
- Local school board election
- History of racial tension
- Ruling on court-ordered busing
- Other community engagement efforts around the issue of race or education
- Changes in district administration
- Significant changes in school policies or school assignments
- Shifts in the racial or ethnic demographics of schools
- Political unrest
- Fear of speaking out among residents
- Publicized incidents of racism at schools

For example, the recent release of a report on student performance could help by piquing public interest in education. On the other hand, long-running controversies over race or education could have resulted in public indifference and distrust, and might pose as serious barriers to public conversations.

To build support early on, consider meeting with key stakeholders to ease any concern and minimize resistance. These stakeholders will vary from community to community, but might include the mayor, superintendent, school board members, school principals and leaders in minority communities. Before you engage the broader community, it might also be a good idea to offer training on cultural sensitivity and racism to organizational staff, board members, and others involved in planning the conversations.

In any case, try to capitalize on the opportunities your community presents and make sure conversations on education and race are meaningful and timely. This might mean linking with a partner to enhance an initiative already underway or scheduling conversations at time when the public is most interested in education or race issues.

ESTABLISHING A TIMELINE

It usually helps to set an initial timeline for planning activities, making allowances for the inevitable changes that will occur as your plans progress. This timeline will help set the context of early key decisions.

TIMELINE TOOL FROM BALTIMORE

ACTIVITY	TARGETED DATE OF COMPLETION	GROUPS/INDIVIDUAL INVOLVED
Hold initial planning meeting		
Set goals and objectives		
Identify partners		
Develop format for public forums		
Develop/modify questions for discussion		
Collect student achievement data		
Conduct moderator training		
Distribute articles for publication		
Advertise public forums in local newspapers		
Hold practice session for moderators		
Evaluate results		
Develop action plan from information collected during forums		
Write op-ed pieces for local newspapers		
Disseminate findings and results from public forums		
Present local findings at state and national forums		
Assess follow-up activities		

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CREATING A PROJECT BUDGET

Set a realistic budget for the project, taking into account each of the expenses that might be incurred. Note that volunteer support and in-kind donations might offset some cash expenses. For example, partners and other supporters might agree to donate meeting space, food, and printing services.

The sites highlighted in this report received grants of up to $25,000 to carry out research, planning, training and multiple public forums. The public forums conducted by the LEFs ranged from one large town meeting to a series of small-group meetings for 15 study circles, as reported in the previous section of this report. Each site was also required to generate matching funds and in-kind donations through local networks. The scope of work, resources, number of partners, and the number of public forums varied from site to site, and accordingly their budgets differed greatly as well.

TOOL: SAMPLE BUDGET CATEGORIES AND ESTIMATED COSTS FOR MULTIPLE PUBLIC FORUMS - GATHERED FROM PROJECT SITES

COST CATEGORY	ESTIMATED RANGE OF EXPENSES
Meetings (including meeting facility rental, audio-visual equipment rental, meals, refreshments and beverages)	$3,000 - $6,000
Stipends for Facilitators (optional)	$0 - $3,600
Translators / Interpreters	$750 - $1,000
Publications - optional (e.g. research documents and books on educational reform and public engagement)	$0 - $3,000
Copying / Printing	$1,000 - $3,000
Postage	$1,000 - $1,700
Phone/Fax	$500 - $1,000
Staff time (salaries and benefits, generally based on 30% - 50% of a fulltime project coordinator' s time, plus support from other staff members)	$15,000 - $18,750
Consultants (obtaining professional services and expertise for collecting and analyzing, training facilitators, public relations and communication, and evaluation)	$2,000 - $5,000
TOTAL	**$23,250 - 43,050**

- SELECTING AN APPROACH TO THE CONVERSATION
- RECRUITING FACILITATORS / MODERATORS
- ASSIGNING RECORDERS
- CHOOSING A MEETING PLACE FOR CONVERSATIONS

SELECTING AN APPROACH TO THE CONVERSATION

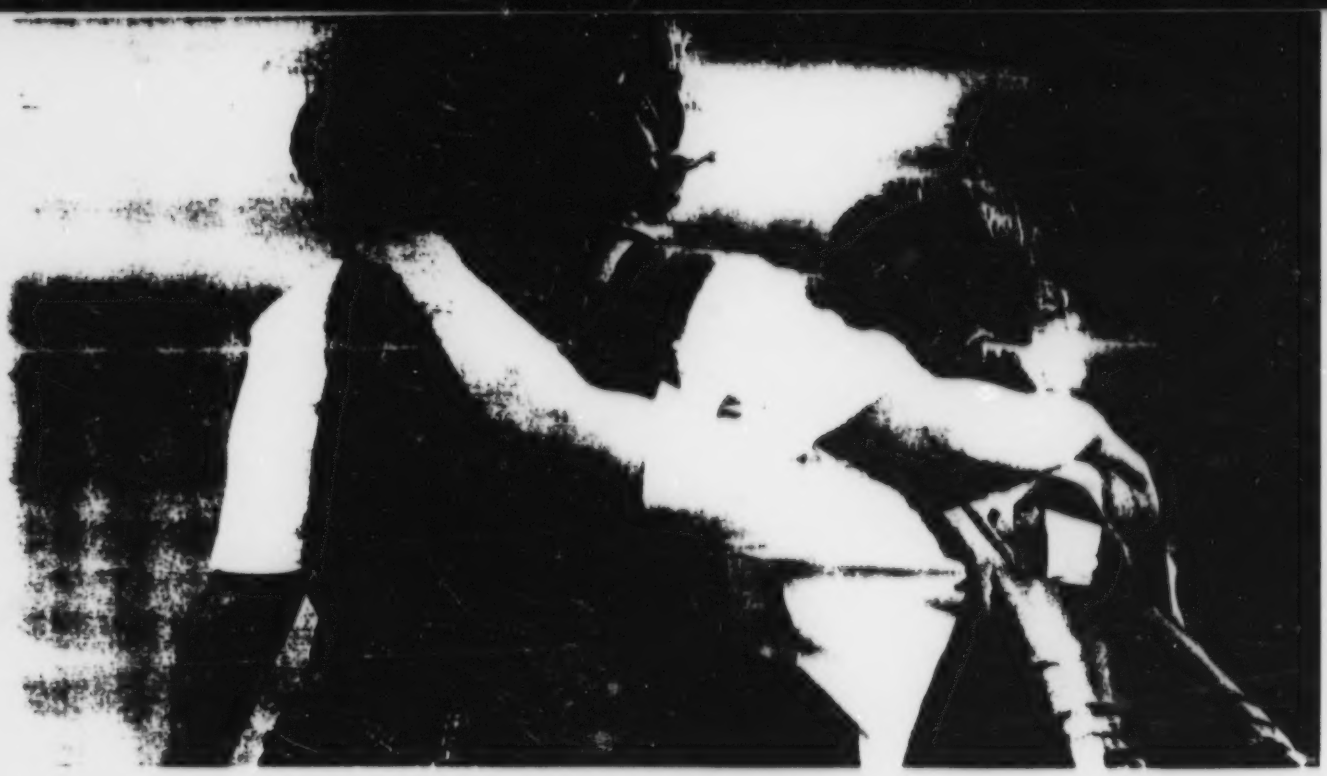
Choose an approach to public engagement best suits your project goals, community context and organizational mission and programming. Research various models for public engagement, and then choose an approach that meet the needs of local citizens and can pave the way for future work. Many communities take the approach of integrating two or more models. If you like some elements of one model, adapt it for use in your community, by creating new elements or by blending elements of another existing model. Grand Rapids and Paterson, for example, used formats that were familiar to their stakeholders, and then integrated these models with the Public Agenda discussion framework.

Below are descriptions of the models used by sites participating in the PEN and Public Agenda Education and Race Initiative.

Public Agenda Town Meeting Framework

This model emerged from Public Agenda's research and observations in the field regarding the attitudes, priorities, and perceptions of the public toward school reform issues. Essential elements of this dialogue approach are:

- *Sponsorship and organization by local community groups*, such as parents, school systems, and chambers of commerce, usually in combination.
- *Diversity among participants*, in terms of age, occupation and background to ensure that voices from all segments of the population are heard. Demographic diversity by itself, however, is not enough. It is vital to draw participants who are not "the usual suspects," that is, people whose opinions are rarely asked for, but who make up the bulk of the community. To get such variety requires sustained outreach to broad segments of the community to ensure that a wide spectrum of local stakeholders and viewpoints are represented, including parents, teachers, students, residents without children in school, employers, and clergy.
- *Small moderated group discussions* of about 15 people. Moderators, who are usually trained local volunteers, do not take part but rather play a nonpartisan role, keeping dominant personalities at bay and ensuring that all participants and viewpoints get a chance to be heard. Each group also has a recorder, again, a local volunteer, who



must capture live conversation with enough clarity and detail for organizers to use the notes to plan follow-up activities.

- *Discussions centered around several choices* designed to help citizens understand alternate way of approaching an issue.
- *Discussions centered on understanding differing perspectives* and exchanging points of view, not on advocating pre-existing opinions and platforms.

A typical forum might draw about 100 participants, from various professions and backgrounds. After registration, a meal, and welcoming remarks, participants spend about two hours in small group discussions on the issue. Afterward they all regroup for the closing presentation, highlighting summaries of the discussions, and ideas for follow-up. Participants are then asked to complete a post-meeting questionnaire for a final chance to comment on the forum's topic, format, their experiences in the conversation, and their ideas for future action.

Contact Public Agenda for more information on the town meeting framework, including *Time To Move On* and other publications, research results, video, and materials on public engagement, and trainers.

PUBLIC AGENDA ▪ NEW YORK, NY ▪ (212) 686-6610 ▪ WWW.PUBLICAGENDA.ORG

Standards in Practice (SIP)

Developed by the Education Trust, a Washington-based nonprofit organization, SIP is a process that builds support for high standards for all students and offers strategies to accelerate gains among low-performing students, many of whom are low-income and minority.

SIP works with schools and classrooms, with parents and community members, and with community and education stakeholders. It is one of the Education Trust tools for delivering compre-

hensive reform with support from inside and outside of the school system. The focus of SIP is on maintaining regular, structured conversations about standards and student work that ultimately lead to an examination of teacher work. These conversations also provide the opportunity to explore how to best use school, district, and community resources in support of standards. SIP is used as a "quality control" tool as well as a professional development process for assuring that ongoing, high-level curricula and instruction are available to all students.

SIP comprises four models that, together, assure that all school activity is aligned and targeted at helping all students meet standards. All models share three non-negotiable components:

- *School-based teams* to build consensus about what standards look like in practice;
- *Time built into the regular schedule* for ongoing team meetings; and
- *Community participation* so that parents, community leaders, district administrators, and teachers are all on the same page when talking about standards for all students.

Contact the Education Trust for more information on *Standards in Practice*, as well as national and state data, and trainers and presenters.

THE EDUCATION TRUST ▪ WASHINGTON, DC ▪ (202) 293-1217 ▪ WWW.EDTRUST.ORG

Study Circles

Study Circles are an informal, practical, and effective way to provide adult learning and social change. The model is rooted in the civic movements of the 19th century. The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., promotes the use of public engagement, described as "small-group, democratic, and highly participatory discussions." This national model is designed to engage citizens in dialogue – on a range of topics – that will transform their communities.

Study Circles (also known as "guided discussions") can vary in size from five to 15 people. Individuals (drawn from a workplace, civic organization, neighborhood, family, church congregation, school, or town) can form an informal group and agree to meet several times to learn about a social or political issue in a democratic and collaborative way. Groups can decide how frequently they would like to meet, but generally discussions are held over a series of four two-hour sessions. Discussion leaders, acting as facilitators, guide the discussion by asking questions, identifying key points, and managing the group process. Complex issues are broken down into manageable subdivision and controversial topics are dealt with in depth.

SCRC produces discussion guides, called *The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guides*, on a variety of topics, including for education, violence, racism and race relations, sexual harassment, and civil rights for gays and lesbians. The reading material stimulates discussion and provides a common reference point.

Contact the Study Circles Resource Center for more information on Study Circles, collaborative learning, publications and guides (many provided at no charge), and presenters.

STUDY CIRCLES RESOURCE CENTER ▪ POMFRET, CT ▪ (860) 928-2616 ▪ WWW.STUDYCIRCLES.ORG

Fishbowl conversations (also referred to as the Kiva model)

Kiva is a Native American term for a large, underground chamber used by Pueblo men for secret ceremonies. The conversation model, derived from Native American practices, is based on two sets of circles, one for speakers and one for listeners.

The listeners sit in an outer circle and look on as the inner circle of speakers discusses an issue – hence the name "fishbowl" conversations. Six speakers and a moderator are seated in the inner circle, which includes with two empty chairs. The designated listeners are seated in the outer circle. Only people seated in the inner circle may speak on the identified issue. By moving to one of the empty inner chairs, listeners are allowed to join the conversation to ask clarifying questions. The discussion format often forces participants to listen more attentively that they ordinarily would.

The Paterson Education Fund (PEF) uses the fishbowl model extensively. For more information on how to plan and facilitate a fishbowl conversation, visit:

1. www.appstate.edu/www_docs/depart/freshman/Fishbowl.html
2. www.exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol37/no4/p25.htm

These are only four highlighted models for public engagement. You and your local partners might choose to identify and learn about others.

■ LESSON LEARNED

SELECTING A MODEL: When selecting a model make sure the materials used to engage the public reflect the needs of your residents. For example, publications are easy to understand and jargon-free, videos and written material are available in foreign languages, and materials contain racially and culturally diverse images.

■ LESSON LEARNED

MODERATORS: The success of conversations depends on the effectiveness of moderators. Choose your moderators carefully and train them well.

RECRUITING FACILITATORS/MODERATORS

Moderators play a key role in the community conversation, determining in large part the quality of the experience. Public Agenda reports that it has occasionally encountered people with a great deal of facilitating experience who do poorly in public conversations on education and race, and those with no experience who do very well. The following guidelines should help to select prospective moderators for training. Note that the most important qualifications – "people skills" and a real interest in supporting an open, inclusive dialogue – should be kept in mind regardless of a candidate's background on paper.

Many of the PEN and Public Agenda conversation sites used bi-racial teams of two moderators for each discussion group. Sites report that this type of co-facilitation works well for conversations on education and race.

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Desired Skills, Knowledge and Background for Moderators and Facilitators

Ideally, moderators will have the following skills, knowledge, and background:

- Group facilitation skills/experience, particularly in working with diverse groups and with the general public (as opposed to professional facilitators only)
- Skills to help participants articulate the reasoning, experiences, and values supporting their positions
- Comfort and ability to manage group conflict
- The ability to take a nonpartisan moderating stance
- Nonpartisan credibility. Some people may be *able* to moderate in a nonpartisan manner but who, because of past associations, will not be *viewed* in the that light by conversation participants
- Some general familiarity with local issues and education reform debates, although expertise is not required. This attribute is less important than the others are.
- Overall diversity. The cadre of moderators should reflect the demographics of the community, so it is important to have multiple forms of diversity (race, ethnicity, gender, language, etc.) among the moderators.

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING AND TRAINING FACILITATORS AND MODERATORS

- Target those with past training and experience as facilitators
- Find nonpartisan moderators, people without agendas
- Use bi-racial, co-facilitation – assigning two facilitators of different races that reflect local demographics or conversations participants – as an effective measure for public discussions on race
- Offer stipends ($100 - $250), optional
- Bring in experts to train facilitators
- Hold refresher courses and practice sessions for facilitators to sharpen their skills before leading public conversations

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

EFFECTIVE MODERATORS

During conversations moderators:

- Probe for information
- Facilitate group discussion
- Maintain the group's focus
- Bring closure for next steps

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WHERE TO FIND PROSPECTIVE MODERATORS

Conversation moderators are often drawn from:

- Business, including trainers and consultants
- Religious groups, including pastoral counselors
- Social workers and others in community service
- Education, including higher education

ASSIGNING RECORDERS

The recording function – taking written notes of what conversation participants are saying – is a difficult and important role at public forums. Some organizers make the mistake of overlooking this function. Be sure to identify a pool of recorders and assign one to each discussion group.

■ LESSON LEARNED

GROUP SIZE: Keep small discussion groups at a manageable number. The recommended number of group participants will vary depending on the conversation model. Eight to 15 is a common range of participants per small group. Although the number of participants can influence the effectiveness of the conversation, every site found the real key to meaningful conversations was a high degree of diversity.

Recorders need to listen well, have a knack for summing up someone's point, and write legibly. They also might benefit from attending the moderator training session (or at least a major portion of it) to truly understand their role during the conversations. One approach is to recruit enough moderators so that some can serve as recorders.

CHOOSING A MEETING PLACE FOR CONVERSATIONS

The physical site for a conversation can greatly affect how community members perceive it and who will attend. Choose meeting locations based on two points of view: as a prospective participant and as an organizer. Participants are generally attracted to meeting locations that they perceive as convenient, comfortable, safe, and welcoming. As an organizer you will want a location that can accommodate the anticipated number of participants, conversation dates and times, and the planned meeting format. For example, when using the Town Meeting Framework, find a meeting place with a sufficient number of breakout rooms, large enough to accommodate 15 people seated in circles or semicircles.

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- Select places that are accessible to a broad cross-section of the community
- Select places that offer an inviting environment
- Make sure there are a sufficient number of parking spaces – nearby, safe, and free of charge
- Avoid busy places where noise and passers-by may distract participants
- Make sure there are enough electrical outlets, if presentations require technology
- Make there are a sufficient number of breakout rooms. Avoid having more than one small group conversations in the same room, unless there are partitions
- Make sure there are enough restrooms in the building
- When using a model that requires a series of conversations, designate one meeting location for the duration of the series. When using a Town Meeting Framework, consider holding conversations at multiple locations to attract a variety of residents.

It is also important to select a neutral site, that is, a place where a cross-section of the community will feel at ease. Schools are frequent meeting places, but avoid schools where major community controversies are swirling.

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

POTENTIAL MEETING PLACES

- Museum
- School
- Church
- College campus
- Community center
- City Auditorium or convention center
- Hotel
- Business or church retreat/ meeting facility

TOOL: CONVERSATION AGENDA FROM BALTIMORE

DISCUSSION FRAMEWORK FOR *STANDARDS IN PRACTICE*

30 min – Introduction*

- Welcome / Purpose
- Group Introductions
- Ground Rules

1 hr 45 min – How can we help all students in the community be more successful in school?

- Introduction to *Standards in Practice* model
- *Standards in Practice* model and discussion

15 min – Possible next steps

20 min – How well are our students doing in school?

- Look at school system / state achievement data

10 min – Closure

3 HRS TOTAL

* Light supper (or the appropriate meal for the time slot) is served at each meeting.

DISCUSSION FORMAT FOR PUBLIC AGENDA TOWN MEETING FRAMEWORK

45 min – Registration and Dinner

15 min – Large Group Welcome and Overview

10 min – Break

2 hrs – Small Group Moderated Discussions: "Helping All Students Achieve in a Diverse Society"

- Topic One: How well are our students doing in school?
- Topic Two: How can we help all children to succeed in a diverse society? (video)
- Topic Three: How can schools, family and the wider community do a better job of working together to help all children succeed?
- Summary

45 min – Large Group Wrap-up and Survey

Resources for more information on getting started

ANNENBERG INSTITUTE FOR SCHOOL REFORM ▪ PROVIDENCE, RI ▪ (401) 863-7990 ▪ WWW.AISR.BROWN.EDU

PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK (PEN) ▪ WASHINGTON, DC ▪ (202) 628-7460 ▪ WWW.PUBLICEDUCATION.ORG

THE RIGHT QUESTION PROJECT, INC. ▪ SOMERVILLE, MA ▪ (617) 492-1900 ▪ WWW.RIGHTQUESTION.ORG

- DECIDING WHAT DATA TO COLLECT
- COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA
- PRESENTING INFORMATION IN A USER-FRIENDLY FORMAT
- USING DATA RESPONSIBLY

DECIDING WHAT DATA TO COLLECT

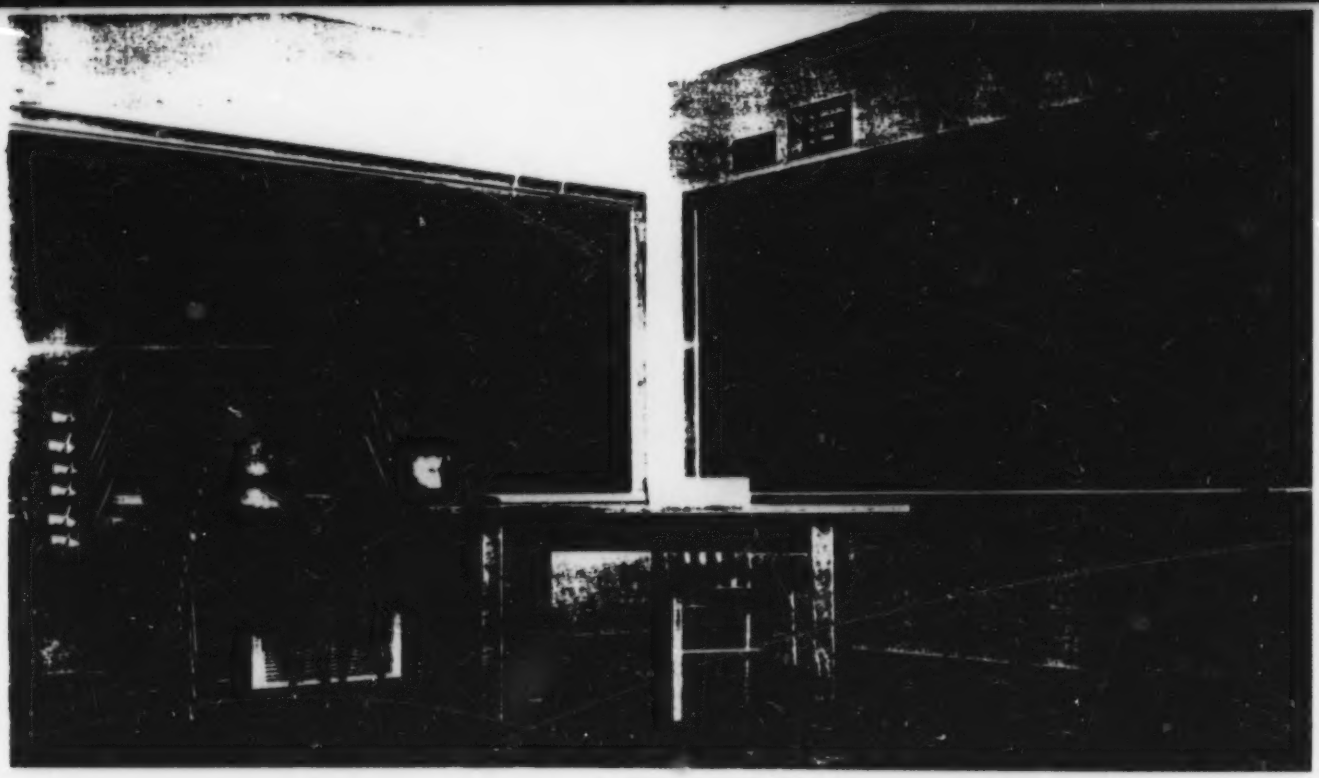
Many sites rated collecting data on student achievement and race as their greatest challenge. And although it can be challenging, student and school data can be important for planning a healthy public conversation.

It should be noted that while many sites chose to collect data to inform their conversation participants and to assess local progress, data on schools and students is not essential for all conversations. Clearly there are models that require data and there are times when data is useful, but for some communities presenting data to the general public may be an impediment to or an unnecessary element of their conversations on education and race. For example, some sites used approaches where community discussions were data-driven while other sites held meaningful conversations without presenting data. Once again, it will be up to local organizers to assess community needs and to determine whether data should be integrated into public conversations.

If you choose to use data, think carefully about which student data you want to present to conversation participants. There is a broad range of data on schools generated by school districts, universities, and community groups. The data you decide to collect should be relevant and meaningful, and inform the discussions on education and race. Think about the potential range of conversation participants – young parents and retirees, educators and students, and college graduates and high school dropouts. Use data that will interest and offer insights for every participant.

It is also a good idea to collect student data from multiple years to analyze trends in demographics and academic performance. These trends can be used to highlight strengths and weaknesses in schools.

Remember that while you want your research to be thorough, avoid going overboard by collecting too much data and overloading participants. This kind of "data dump" can overwhelm the general public and give a distinct advantage to participants most familiar with research and statistical data.



■ LESSON LEARNED

AVAILABILITY OF TEST DATA: Find out when test results will be released. The timing can have two implications: the availability of the most recent test results and the publicity (good or bad) surrounding the results.

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

TYPES OF DATA TO PRESENT

You may choose to share the following information with conversation participants:

- School enrollment
- Enrollment by race and socioeconomic status
- Enrollment by percentage of total population
- Educational attainment of people over age of 25
- Educational attainment by race and socioeconomic status
- Student achievement scores
- Student achievement scores by race and socioeconomic status
- Dropout rate
- Dropout rate by race and socioeconomic status
- Mobility rates
- Mobility rates by race and socioeconomic status
- College attendance rates
- College attendance rates by race and socioeconomic status
- Minority and low-income enrollment in gifted programs, special education, college prep courses

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COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

SOURCES FOR STUDENT DATA

Look to the following groups for data:

- School districts
- State and national departments of education
- Colleges of education
- Local education writers and newspapers
- Nonprofit organizations focusing on education – at the local, state, and national levels (e.g., LEFs, state education policy groups, and Education Trust)

Develop a strategy to collect the data needed. Use local partners and relationships with district administrators to gain access to test results and other research. Expect to go to more than one source, in the event you run into a dead-end. Some project sites report that local and state departments of education were reluctant or slow to respond to their initial requests for school records. The reasons ranged from concerns about protecting confidential information on students, to limitations on how school systems track data, to fears about exposing educational deficiencies and revealing achievement gaps. In any case, be resourceful and persistent – and when necessary, patient – in obtaining the data you want.

Groups can learn a lot about student performance at local schools by looking closely at basic data. Analyzing data does not have to involve complicated formulas and statistics. On the contrary, much can be gained by calculating averages, percents, and rates based on readily available data on students and schools.

If you need assistance with data analysis, consider bringing in a volunteer with the appropriate expertise, perhaps someone from the planning committee. Or hire a researcher from a local college or research firm.

PRESENTING INFORMATION IN A USER-FRIENDLY FORMAT

Share school and student data with the public by using a straightforward and an easily understood format and simple language. Your research does not have to be extensive, only accurate and reliable. Publications like school report cards or fact sheets might already exist in the community. If so, use these reports or create new ones presenting "snapshots" of key data on school and student performance.

■ LESSON LEARNED

USING DATA RESPONSIBLY: "We originally used [our district's] student data to paint a bleak picture of the student performance of African Americans in our system, and to show the disparity in achievement between these students and students in the rest of the state (by race). We also initially planned to use these data at the beginning of our conversations, for introductory purposes. What we have learned is that the data, if they are not placed in a broader context – including what we can do about the data – can derail a conversation...."

As a result, organizers elected to share success stories from across the country, "so that participants are left with the understanding that urban children can and are performing at national levels." Local data was not used in the conversations. But, most parents and the community members know that local students are not performing at high levels. The stories from other communities helped frame the conversations and offered strategies for improvement.

— Based on a report from one site's project coordinator

USING DATA RESPONSIBLY

Take care in choosing what data to collect and how you present it. Avoid – at all costs – misinforming or misleading participants. Be sure the information distributed to the general public is accurate and credible. Conversations on race and education often require data disaggregated by race, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Be sure to present this information with sensitivity. Some conversation participants – particularly minorities, low-income residents, and those new to education discussions – may be put off by data emphasizing the backgrounds of students.

More resources for researching your schools and community:

REPORTING RESULTS: WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS TO KNOW
(Research report, 12-minute video summarizing the research and prototype school report card)
A-Plus Communications • Arlington, VA • (703) 524-7425 • www.apluscommunications.com

AT YOUR FINGERTIPS: USING EVERYDAY DATA TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS
MPR Associates, Inc. • Berkeley, CA • (800) 677-6987 • www.mprinc.com

EDUCATION WATCH: THE 1998 STATE AND NATIONAL DATA BOOK
The Education Trust • Washington, DC • (202) 293-1217 • www.edtrust.org

LEARNING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER • PITTSBURGH, PA
University of Pittsburgh • (412) 624-7450 • www.lrdc.pitt.edu

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
Washington, DC • (301) 457-4700 (customer service) • (301) 457-4717 (general information) • www.census.gov

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION • WASHINGTON, DC
http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts (Fast Facts)
www.ed.gov

- RECRUITING CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS
- TAPPING ESTABLISHED NETWORKS
- TAKING MEASURES TO ENSURE DIVERSITY
- RECRUITING OBSERVERS

RECRUITING CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS

It takes special, creative efforts to recruit people who do not tend to be involved. Even though sites create categories of participants (parents, educators, senior citizens) each person should be invited as an individual bringing his or her own points of view, rather than being invited as a representative of a group, profession, or affiliation.

Take measures to over-recruit those community members who are least likely to come, such as lower income people who might find the travel more difficult to negotiate, or those who feel they have nothing to say because they do not have children in school. Do not over-recruit those most likely to attend, like teachers.

Some of the Education and Race Initiative project sites used an invitational approach to draw participants. In this way, a more representative and diverse group can be assembled and you can avoid single-issue types of people dominating the conversations. It is best to draw participants from a cross-section of the community with a majority of them representing the general public rather than professionals, experts, or activists.

Invitations – whether written or verbal – should come from credible sources that community members know and can identify with. For example, a respected parent or senior citizen is often the most effective person to invite other parents or senior citizens to attend. Perhaps invitations will come from the planning committee chair or the entire committee, with the signature of each member. Some sites organized telephone trees to make personal requests by phone.

People should get the idea that this meeting is different – e.g., less "political" and more interesting – than other public forums that they may have attended. Consistently convey this message in invitations, flyers, announcements, and opening remarks at public forums.

Organize meetings so that all types of people are encouraged to attend and publicize these efforts. Hold conversations in well-known, accessible locations that people feel comfortable

visiting at the time of day of the meeting. Organizers may want to provide some transportation for participants who don't drive, childcare for parents, and interpreters for those who do not speak English.

Remember there are, of course, limits to how far organizers can go to make the meeting accessible. Time and money can be a factor. Depending on the facility, there may not be appropriate space for childcare. These guidelines are meant, therefore, as suggestions, and it is up to you to improvise on them as seems appropriate for your situation.

Prospective Participants

The community voices you want to hear:

- Teachers
- Principals
- Public housing residents
- Parents and grandparents of public school students
- School board members
- Middle and high school students
- College students, especially those from education colleges
- Young adults (those age 21 – 25, who may not have school-age children)
- Business people
- Taxpayers
- Private school parents
- Senior citizens

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TAPPING ESTABLISHED NETWORKS

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Consider tapping these networks for diverse conversation participants:

- Local education funds (LEFs)
- Parent associations (e.g., PTA, PTO, Parents for Public Education)
- School district administration
- Neighborhood associations
- Faith community (e.g. mosques, churches, synagogues, temples)
- Colleges and universities
- High school student clubs
- Urban League
- Cultural and ethnic associations (e.g. Caribbean Association)
- Civic organizations
- Senior citizen groups
- Teen parent programs
- Junior League
- Boys and Girls Clubs/YMCA groups

Efforts to draw a cross-section of participants will go farther when organizers tap into the community's established networks of people. Early on, build relationships with organizations whose members represent potential conversation participants. Partners or planning committee members often are a part of these networks and it also may be necessary to reach out to additional community organizations.

■ LESSON LEARNED

GETTING PEOPLE TO THE TABLE: Make personal calls to prospective participants and then make a reminder call on the day of the event. To get the job done quickly, start a "phone tree" with organizers and volunteers by divvying lists of community members.

"...with few exceptions, participants came because of a personal call that had been made."

— A project coordinator

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Consider these strategies, used by several project sites, to get the word out about your conversations on education and race.

Phone tree – this approach requires organizers to divide a telephone list of community members among a pool of volunteers. Each volunteer agrees to call a specific number of prospective participants (perhaps 10 people) and each person who is called is asked to call more people, creating a snowball effect. The same approach works with e-mail, as well. People often respond positively to personal calls, requesting their participation at a community event. The personal touch can make people feel their participation is valued.

Snowball effect – this technique is similar to the phone tree, but is used more broadly. Partners and volunteers identify others (usually personal friends and acquaintances) interested in the conversation topic. Those individuals are contacted (by phone, in writing, or in person) and asked to spread the word through the community.

Social interaction – this strategy requires organizers to contact or visit grassroots organizations throughout the community to introduce the initiative and to request participation from their constituents and members.

Mass mailing – this strategy begins with the collection of mailing lists from partners and other community groups with large memberships — like the chamber of commerce, ministerial associations, neighborhood associations, and the YMCA. A brochure, flyer, or letter, announcing the public conversations, is mailed to hundreds or thousands of prospective participants. Of all the recruitment strategies, mass mailing was the least effective.

TAKING MEASURES TO ENSURE DIVERSITY

A mix of participants is important for a well-rounded conversation on education and race. Remember diversity goes beyond race and extends to gender, age, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood, and profession. Avoid a gathering of the "usual suspects," by using the same mailing lists and tried-and-true communications plans from past initiatives. Cast your nets wide to draw fresh faces and new voices from the parents and community members who are seldom invited to participate. *Do not underestimate the challenge.* Project organizers confirm it is hard work to attract participants who do not generally attend school events, public forums, or school board meetings. It is possible – albeit, labor intensive – and it is necessary to generate the rich discussions, dynamic solutions, and lasting improvements communities seek.

Take extra measures to build relationships with groups who are often underrepresented and publicize your conversations through the communication channels they rely upon. This includes using the networks previously mentioned, as well as door-to-door campaigns, personal appeals, and strategic media campaigns.

Monitor who is registering for conversations and allow time to adjust recruitment strategies, if necessary, to enroll the number and range of participants you want. In Buffalo, prospective participants received sign-up sheets detailing meeting dates, times and locations of sessions across the community. There was space on these sheets for participants to identify their race and ethnicity. When participants mailed in their sheets, the information on the returned forms was used to assign participants to circles in an effort to ensure diversity within each small group.

SETTING UP FOR PUBLIC FORUMS

Begin setting up the meeting place well before the conversations take place. Make sure everything is in place and up and running for a successful event.

Set up a registration table where participants enter the building. Here they can obtain a participant guide, nametags indicating their small group assignment, and any other materials for distribution. Make sure there are helpful, friendly people at the registration table and stationed around the premises to direct people and answer questions about the community conversation.

Before participants arrive, test the equipment that will be used during the public forum such as microphones, televisions, VCRs, overhead projectors, computers, and LCD panels. Some sites chose to use a cameras, video-recorders, and tape recorders to document their public forum.

One site, Forward in the Fifth, recommends setting up the recorder's easel in a discreet location, so it will not distract conversation participants. In one of their conversations, organizers in Kentucky found that people were speaking to the recorder who was taking notes rather talking to one another.

TOOL FROM PEBC IN DENVER

SAMPLE LETTER TO CONFIRM PARTICIPATION IN TRAINING

Dear [Prospective Participant] ,

I am writing this letter to confirm your participation in our upcoming training [e.g. parent training or moderator training]. The training will take place [day, date, and time] in the [meeting place, including room number and street address].

A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided as part of the training. In addition, you will be provided a stipend for your time and dedication. Please let us know if you have to pay for childcare so that we can reimburse your expenses.

Thank you once again for participation in the very important training. I look forward to seeing you there!

Sincerely,

Parent Liaison

Estimados Padres de familia,

Les estoy escribiendo esta carta para confirmar su participacion en nuestro proximo Entrenamiento para Padres de Familia. Tal entrenamiento se llevara a cabo en la siguiente forma:

[Fecha, hora, y lugar]

Se les proveera, un desayuno tipo continental y comida. Tambien se les proveera de guarderia para sus hijos y una gratificacion economica. Por favor dejenos saber si ustedes prefieren que otra persona cuide a sus hijos, nosotros le podemos reembolsar por eso.

Gracias una vez mas por su participacion en este entrenamiento tan importante, los esperamos!

Sinceramente,

Enlace Comunitario

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

EVENT DAY CHECKLIST

Make sure these items are available at the meeting location on the day of your conversations:

- Tables and chairs (enough to accommodate planned activities and an overflow of participants)
- Food, utensils, and paper products (meals, beverages, ice, snacks, forks and cups, napkins, etc.)
- Moderator guides
- Participant guides
- Name tags
- Flip charts with easels
- Markers
- Tape
- Clock/timer
- VCR(s) and television(s)
- Screen(s)
- Public Agenda video
- Podium and microphones
- Microphones
- Notepads and pens
- Evaluation forms

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

RESOURCES AND SERVICES TO DRAW BROAD ATTENDANCE AND STRONG PARTICIPATION

Logistics to consider attract parents and other community residents:

- Offering a meal or refreshments
- Distributing written materials, including an agenda, participant list, evaluation forms, and sources of more information
- Promoting elements that make this public forum different from other community meetings and events
- Presenting data on schools and student performance
- Offering childcare
- Entertaining children with movies, games, art, and recreation
- Providing language interpreters (e.g. Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, American Sign Language)
- Distributing commemorative items, such as certificates of participation, stickers, buttons, pencils/pens, coffee mugs, and T-shirts

TOOL: MEETING GROUND RULES FROM FORWARD IN THE FIFTH IN KENTUCKY

GROUND RULES

- Stay on track – get out on time
- Everyone contributes to the conversation
- Participants may disagree with ideas, not people
- Everyone is free to express ideas and views, and to consider the views of others

TOOL FROM PPE IN GRAND RAPIDS

GROUND RULES

- First, let's all work together to keep the conversation on track and to make sure everyone has an equal chance to talk. If someone is talking at great length, I may remind him or her that we need to open things up so everyone can participate.
- Second, we want this to be a session where people feel free to express their views of others. It's OK to agree with others and it's OK to disagree as well. We will want to see how much common ground there is when we've finished the discussion, but don't need to end the meeting all agreeing. We don't need to reach consensus. If we do, we do.
- If you do disagree with another group members, we just ask that you disagree with ideas, not with people. In other words, lets keep this constructive and avoid getting personal.

Does anyone have anything to add? Are we ready to get started?

TOOL FROM PPE IN GRAND RAPIDS

MODERATOR NOTES

Prejudice – when an original belief continues to be believed after new facts, which dispute its validity, are rejected. An emotional commitment to ignorance. Commonly held stereotypes of people.

Stereotypes – a single image of a group of people made to prevent acceptance of differences between individuals in the group. Making up a pretend category about individuals of similar appearances for simplifying understanding or casting blame. Stereotypes serve to mask the holder's own feelings of inadequacy and help isolate one from relationships with different people.

Race – the mark or criterion for assigning cultural traits and characteristics. In the United States people are classified into races and consequently cultural groups by skin color, language, and physical features.

Racism – a hidden disease of perceptions, beliefs and behaviors which elevates (on the basis of skin color, a stereotype) one group of people over another to promote pretend positions of power versus powerless, affluence versus poverty, and good versus bad.

SOURCES: Institute for Healing Racism (2/99). Handbook of Multicultural Counseling (1995).

■ LESSON LEARNED

CODED LANGUAGE: It is often difficult to talk explicitly about race in public forums. Participants may use code words, like "inner city" and "those people," rather than directly speaking about race. Listen for such language in your public conversations. Well-trained moderators will recognize code words and will be skilled at probing underlying issues of race and education to advance the conversations.

RECRUITING OBSERVERS

Observers are often invited by the local organizers to listen to the views of conversation participants, without actually participating themselves. Observers also can be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of the conversation. Each project site handled observers in different ways and it will be up to you to determine who should be invited as observers and what their role will be.

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

CONVERSATION OBSERVERS

Consider inviting these groups to come and listen only:

- School board members
- District superintendent
- Elected officials
- Boards of directors and staff from partnering organizations
- Media

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Helping All Students Succeed in School in a Diverse Society: A Community Dialogue

Everyone wants to see students succeed in school, but too often too many students are doing poorly. In some cases students throughout an entire district are struggling with failing grades and low test scores. Sometimes particular groups of students across a district are achieving at low levels. And even in schools doing better than average, many students say they aren't challenged and work as little as possible to get a passing grade.

How can we do better than failure or just getting by?
How can we help all students learn and grow to the best of their abilities?

Our aim today is to have a community dialogue about how, in a society as diverse as ours, we can best help all children succeed in school. In this way we hope to learn from one another, come to understand the issues more fully, and begin to build more common ground on how schools, families, and the wider community can work together to help all students succeed.

We will begin by examining the questions: How well are students doing in school in our community? Are some doing better than others? Who's succeeding, who's not, and why?

This dialogue is sponsored and organized by _____

Most of our community dialogue will take place in small groups with a moderator whose job is simply to keep the discussion focused and moving along in a way that works well for everyone. The job of participants is simply to think and talk through the following three topics:

- First, we will examine the question: How well are students doing in school in our community?
- Then we will talk about three different approaches to helping all students succeed:
  1. *raising academic standards and expectations*
  2. *increasing parental and community involvement*
  3. *ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment*
- Finally, we will talk about how we can do a better job of working together on behalf of all of our community's students.

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■ CREATING MATERIALS FOR PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

CREATING MATERIALS FOR PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

Get the word out about conversations before *and* after they take place. Cultivate relationships with the media to make sure community members hear about planned conversations and learn about the results of conversations. For example, you might consider submitting op-ed pieces to local journals and newspapers.

■ LESSON LEARNED

GENERATING PUBLICITY: Involve your partners in publicizing the conversations. Encourage partners to announce plans for public conversations at board and committee meetings, at gatherings with constituents, and in organizational newsletters, Web sites, and mailings.

During the planning phase, decide how much media coverage is needed. As some sites reported, they used the media minimally, but focused on publicizing their conversations through other means such as church bulletins, organizational newsletters, and flyers. Create a communications plan that specifically targets the community members you want to draw. This may require using methods and community networks your organization has never used before.

TOOL FROM PEN/PA EDUCATION AND RACE INITIATIVE

STRATEGIES TO GET THE WORD OUT

- Partner with public relations and advertising firms and the media (television and radio stations and newspapers), especially those that serve ethnic audiences.
- Use a local cable station's community bulletin board
- Produce and air public service announcements (PSAs) for TV and radio
- Create an insert for bulletins and newsletters at religious institutions
- Convene roundtable discussions with the media on education topics, such as reforms taking place in schools on how communities can help schools to improve

TOOL: FLYER FROM THE EDUCATION FUND FOR GREATER BUFFALO

DO OUR SCHOOLS MEASURE UP TO YOUR STANDARDS?

You worry about how your kids are doing in school. You wonder if our schools are teaching them what they need to know. You have talked about your concerns before – **and you want answers.**

We do, too. We are the *Education Fund for Greater Buffalo*. Our goal is to improve teaching and learning in our community's schools. And we give money to schools and community groups who can help children learn.

We would like to be a helpful resource for you... and invite you to a discussion where together we can:

Decide what needs to be done
What do you think is keeping your kids from doing their best? What problems need attention first?

Look for solutions
Do you have ideas? What can the community do together?

Put together an Action Plan
We want a plan for change that outlines steps we can all take to make our school better.

Make sure our schools measure up.
Together we can make a difference.

THEY CAN.

We need to make sure they do.
Join our discussion. We'll come to you.

TOOL: FLYER FROM BALTIMORE

Helping All Children Succeed in School in a Diverse Society

Two opportunities to talk openly about the issue of how race impacts educational opportunities for children.

Who should attend?
All who have a role in helping our children achieve: students, parents, business people, community members, members of the faith community, and school system teachers and administrators. These meetings are open to members of the public, private, and parochial school communities, city and suburban residents, as well as residents of any neighboring counties. Please plan to attend only one meeting.

Why participate?

- To have a rich and productive dialogue about issues that are critical to our society today
- To discuss how well students in our district and throughout the state are learning
- To share beliefs about how we could all work to better support students
- To explore together possible steps to engage the community at large in ways to improve education

When and where are these town meetings?

- *First meeting date, time, and place* – RSVP by [state deadline for reserving a seat]
- *Second meeting date, time, and place* – RSVP by [state deadline for reserving a seat]

Directions enclosed

- Dinner will be served at each site, with reservations only. Limited childcare services available. **Please** RSVP to [Name and number of the coordinator] by the above deadlines

Sponsored by [Name of organizing group.]

EVALUATING YOUR WORK

- OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS, MODERATORS, AND OBSERVERS
- REFLECTING ON THE ORIGINAL GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS, MODERATORS, AND OBSERVERS

Develop evaluation forms for participants to determine whether you have achieved your goals. Begin by identifying what want to measure and then create a series of questions and materials that will help you obtain the information. Make forms easy to read and complete. For the best response rate, encourage participants to fill out and return forms at the meeting site immediately following the conversation.

The individuals who serve as moderators, recorders, and observers also are good sources of insightful information on the quality of conversations. Find out how people responded during the discussion groups. For example, on what issues did they agree or disagree? Did a diverse range of people participate? How did moderators perform? Did participants comment on the meeting time location, the publicity, or its coordination?

REFLECTING ON THE ORIGINAL GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

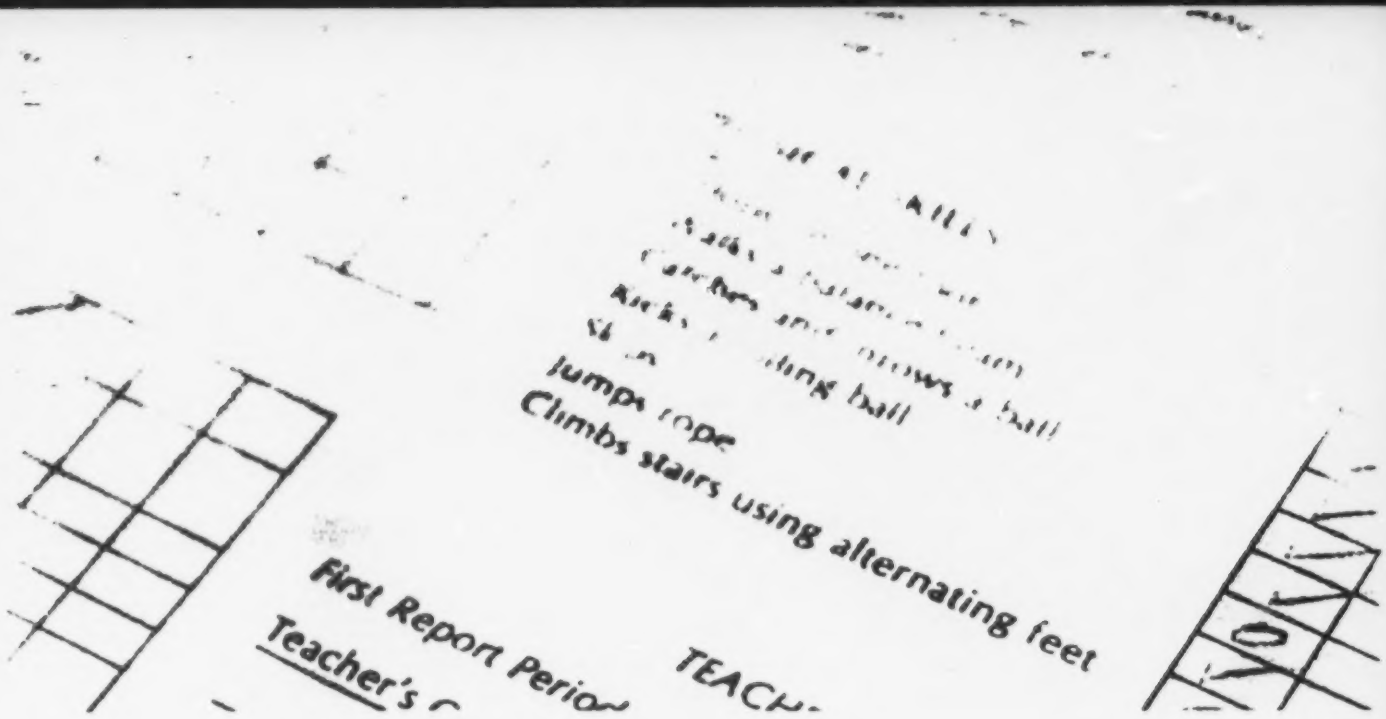
Use the goal and objectives set during the early planning phase to determine if you have accomplished what you set out to do. If you find there is more you would like to do, apply lessons learned from the initial conversations, including the feedback from participants and others, and gear up for a new phase of work.

TOOL: FACILITATOR SUMMARY FORM FROM THE EDUCATION FUND FOR GREATER BUFFALO

FACILITATOR SUMMARY FORM

Facilitator's Name:
Session Number:
Date:

- Describe the areas of common ground expressed in today's session.
- Describe the areas of disagreement expressed in today's session.
- Report issues that need to be probed for the next session.
- Notes for the Action Plan



TOOL: EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS FROM THE EDUCATION FUND FOR GREATER BUFFALO

PLAN FOR EVALUATING PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS

During each Study Circle, at the midpoint and at the final session:

- Evaluate which questions and or presentations were most effective in increasing tolerance

At the end of the series of Study Circles:

- Evaluate if the initiative met our goals for broad scale participation
- Ask participants to record personal changes in attitude
- Ask participants if they are willing to lead or participate in further Study Circles or in a component of the Action Plan – as a measure of commitment.
- Assess whether the Action Plans are realistic, strategic, and likely to have impact

Two months after the conclusion of the Town Meeting:

- Assess if the initial implementation schedule has been achieved.
- Assess if the Action Plan is fully incorporated into our organizational agenda and that of our partners

On a broader level:

- Evaluate if the Action Plan continues to maintain or build momentum
- Assess the degree to which the Action Plan informs and becomes incorporated into other local initiatives focused on race and/or education.

PARTICIPANT SURVEY — *Helping All Children Succeed in School in a Diverse Society: A Community Dialogue*

[Place and Date]

This survey is the final step in the Community Conversation. It will provide more information on your views about today's topic as well as valuable feedback on how to follow up on this meeting and how to make future meetings more successful. Please hand in the survey on your way out, and thank you very much for your participation.

1. Please indicate the small group you were in:

- Having spoken with your neighbors about helping all students succeed, do you have any additional comments on the subject you'd like to make?

- Is there any information or data you feel would be useful as you consider these issues in the future?

- Which of the following would be the most useful way to follow up on today's meetings?

  ❑ More discussion on today's topic - *If this is your choice, what aspect of today's topics needs more attention?*

  ❑ Discussion of different issues - *If this is your choice, what issue would you like to discuss?*

  ❑ Something else - *If this is your choice, please specify:*

- Can you think of any specific individuals or groups who did not attend today's meeting who you think would like to be invited in the future? If so, please list below:

Throughout today's discussion, how often did you:

5. Decide something was more complicated than you originally thought?
   ❑ Never ❑ Once or twice ❑ 3 or more times ❑ Not sure

6. Hear arguments AGAINST your position you thought were good?
   ❑ Never ❑ Once or twice ❑ 3 or more times ❑ Not sure

7. Say something differently than you ordinarily would to avoid offending others?
   ❑ Never ❑ Once or twice ❑ 3 or more times ❑ Not sure

How did today's meeting compare to other discussions of education issues you've been exposed to? Specifically, how did it compare to:

8. New programs
   ❑ Better ❑ Worse ❑ About the same ❑ Not sure

9. Discussions you've seen among politician/experts
   ❑ Better ❑ Worse ❑ About the same ❑ Not sure

10. School board meetings
    ❑ Better ❑ Worse ❑ About the same ❑ Not sure

11. Did you find your moderator to be:
    ❑ Very helpful ❑ Somewhat helpful ❑ Not very helpful ❑ Not helpful at all ❑ Not sure

Comments: _____

_____

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12. Was the video discussion starter:
❑ Very helpful ❑ Somewhat helpful ❑ Not very helpful ❑ Not helpful at all ❑ Not sure

Comments: _____

_____

13. Overall, what did you like most about today's meeting?

14. Overall, what did you like least about today's meeting?

15. Do you have any suggestions for improving the meeting format?

(Questions 16 – 20 are for research purposes only.)

16. Please indicate the category that best describes your main occupation:
❑ Homemaker
❑ Teacher
❑ Student
❑ School administrator
❑ College administrator or educator
❑ Business person
❑ Clergy
❑ Retiree
❑ Other (please specify)

17. Are you a parent of school-age children?
❑ No ❑ Yes

18. *If yes to question #17*: Do they attend
❑ Public schools? ❑ Private schools?
❑ Home school?

19. Are you of Hispanic descent?
❑ Yes ❑ No

20. Do you consider yourself to be:
❑ White
❑ Black/African-American
❑ Asian
❑ Native American
❑ Pacific Islander
❑ Other:

21. Would you like to be informed about activities designed to follow up on today's dialogue
❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Not sure

22. Would you like to help plan and organize activities to follow up on today's dialogue?
❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Not sure

If you said "Yes" or "Not sure" to either question #14 or #15, please fill out the contact information below. You may tear off this sheet and hand it in separately so your earlier answers will remain confidential.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____ E-mail: _____

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RECORDER – MODERATOR – OBSERVER SURVEY

Helping All Children Succeed in School in a Diverse Society: A Community Dialogue

Name: _____

I was a (circle one): recorder / moderator / observer

Location: _____

Date: _____

Part I: Dialogue Content

1 What would you say were the major areas of common ground in the discussion?

2 What were the major areas of disagreement?

3 What were the main areas of question or concern that were raised but not fully addressed?

4 Is there any kind of information that people said they needed?

5 Is there any kind of information that you feel people ought to have?

6 Was the relationship between race and education ever discussed? If so, please summarize what was said and how it came up. Continue on back of page as needed.

1st time: _____

_____

2nd time: _____

_____

3rd time: _____

_____

_____

7 Were any other important or interesting ideas discussed in your group that are not covered in the above questions?

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Part II: Dialogue Process

How helpful was the video in getting the discussion started? Was it:

❑ Very helpful ❑ Somewhat helpful ❑ Not very helpful ❑ Not helpful at all ❑ Not sure

Comments: _____

_____

What was the greatest moderating challenge?

What surprised you most about the group and the discussion?

Which should be the most useful way to follow up on today's meeting?

❑ More discussion on today's topic - *If this is your choice, what aspect of today's topics needs more attention?*

❑ Discussion of different issues - *If this is your choice, what issues would you like to discuss?*

❑ Something else - *If this is your choice, please specify:*

Can you think of any specific individuals or groups who did not attend today's meeting who you think would like to be invited in the future? If so, please list below:

Do you have any recommendations for improving future dialogues?

Additional comments? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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PARTICIPANT SURVEY

This survey is the final step in the community conversation. It will provide more information on your views about today's topic as well as valuable feedback on how to follow up this meeting and how to make future meetings more successful. The responses you give will be kept CONFIDENTIAL. Please hand in the survey on your way out, and thank you very much for your participation.

Please indicate the small group you were in:

I. Purpose of the Community Conversation

Please tell us to what extent you agree with following statements about the purpose of the Community Conversation. Check the choice that most represents your feelings about each statement. A "Neutral" response merely means that you neither disagree nor agree with the statement.

A The community conversation promoted a rich and productive dialogue.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

B The conversation clarified areas of common ground on how to help all children succeed in a diverse society.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

C The conversation clarified areas of disagreement that will need further dialogue.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

D The conversation clarified my questions, concerns, and needs for further information. The conversation will help educators become more aware of the community's perception misconceptions, questions, and value.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

E The conversation helped to establish lines of communication so that new issues can be better addressed as they arise.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

F The conversation will help to build a local capacity to create more, and even better, community conversations in the future.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

G The conversation helped us to explore possible steps, beyond this meeting, to engage the larger community in improving education.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

II. Organization of the Community Conversation

Please tell us what you think about the overall organization of the Community Conversation.

A Overall, the conversation was well organized.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

B The preparation for the meetings, (e.g., logistics, materials, etc.) were well done.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

C The publication, *Time to Move On*, helped to frame the issues around education and race.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

D The video provided a valuable resource to guide the discussion.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

E The location for the meeting (e.g., transportation, parking, etc) was highly accessible.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

F The length of the meeting was adequate to thoroughly address the topic of the conversation.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

G I believe that my participation was valued.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

H This meeting was different from most public forums.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

III. Moderators

Please tell us what you think about the work of the conversation moderators.

A The moderator for my small group generally was well prepared.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

B The moderator exhibited good group facilitation skills.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

C The moderator was able to help me articulate the reasons, experiences, and values supporting the positions I took during the meeting.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

D The moderator made me feel comfortable.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

E The moderator took a nonpartisan approach to the discussion.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

F The moderator generally was familiar with local issues and education reform.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

G The moderator reflected the predominant demographic characteristics, (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) of my community.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

IV. Last Question

I think that meetings like community conversations are important and useful means for addressing and closing achievement gaps in education that are related to race.
❑ Strongly Disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neutral ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly Agree

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- SHARING THE RESULTS FROM CONVERSATIONS
- DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR ACTION
- SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM

SHARING THE RESULTS FROM CONVERSATIONS

Follow up with participants after the initial conversations have ended. Several sites produced reports highlighting discussion topics and participants' ideas for improvement. Whether it is summarizing notes from conversations or a comprehensive report, it is important to keep participants and other stakeholders informed about the results (who attended, how many attended, themes, areas of agreement, and areas of disagreement).

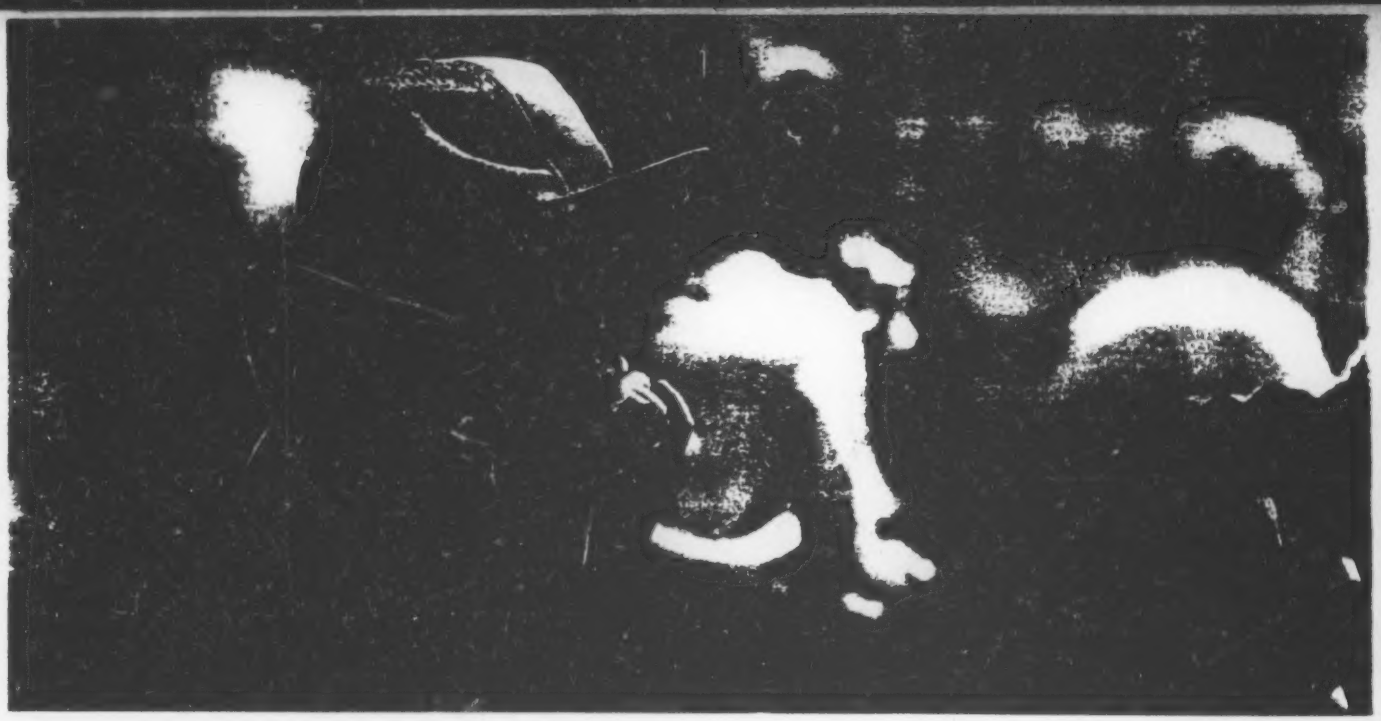
Some communities produced written reports and distributed them to the broader community. In other cases organizers met with principals, the district superintendent, and school board members to present findings from conversations. The local media also can help publicize results.

DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR ACTION

Consider forming subcommittees or work teams to develop a plan of action based on the results of the public conversations. With some approaches, like Study Circles, participants are charged with developing an action plan from the outset.

When the initial conversations have ended, here are a few examples of possible next steps to begin taking action:

- Conduct more formal and informal conversations
- Create committees and subcommittees to review recommendations
- Form new partnerships and collaborations
- Establish new media relationships and communication plans
- Coordinate general and targeted outreach to the community
- Integrate new elements and ideas into existing programs
- Develop specific projects and initiatives in response to issues raised



SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM

Enthusiasm among organizers and participants may be palpable immediately following the conversations. However, the real work of changing what happens in schools and the broader community must be sustained long after organized conversations have ended. Remind stakeholders that the changes they wish to see will require a commitment over the long haul, and then take measures to motivate and support them for the long term.

You might consider holding annual or quarterly sessions where conversations on education and race can continue and people can report on their progress. Another approach may be to produce written progress reports that monitor how well goals are being met.

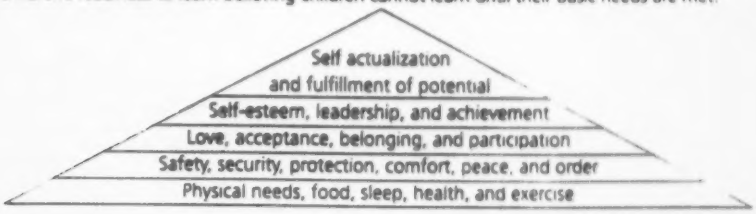
■ LESSON LEARNED

MOVING FORWARD: One challenge is to withstand the political pressure and backlash that may result from airing long-suppressed issues. As groups seeking change have come to know, resistance to change can be a formidable obstacle.

TOOL: MASLOW'S TRIANGLE USED BY THE PATERSON EDUCATION FUND

Hierarchy of Needs

According to Abraham Maslow's theory, basic needs must be met before individuals can step to the next level of development. To develop their action plan, conversation participants applied the theory to children's readiness to learn believing children cannot learn until their basic needs are met.


Self actualization
and fulfillment of potential
Self-esteem, leadership, and achievement
Love, acceptance, belonging, and participation
Safety, security, protection, comfort, peace, and order
Physical needs, food, sleep, health, and exercise

TOOL FROM FORWARD IN THE FIFTH

ACTION PLAN		
Priority Goal #1: [State goal]		
Action	Who will do it?	By when?
1.		
2.		
3.		
Priority Goal #2: [State goal]		
Action	Who will do it?	By when?
1		
2.		
3.		
Priority Goal #3: [State goal]		
Action	Who will do it?	By when?
1.		
2.		
3.		

Organizers in Berea, KY, charted program activities, based on specific categories of work (e.g. research, media/communications). The final category, "program effects", was under development at the time this report was written. When completed, the "program effects" column will include status of goals, unexpected outcomes, challenges and lessons learned.

TOOL FROM FORWARD IN THE FIFTH

ACTIVITIES (ACTUAL PROGRAM)					
Research	Public Engagement	Media Communications	Dissemination	Outputs	Program Effects *under development*
• Researched different conversation models such as Public Agenda, Study Circles, fishbowls, etc. • Researched achievement data for specific areas to use during conversations. • Researched each community to determine which groups were marginalized, who has not had a voice in the past, and how people came to the conversations.	• Convened a steering committee to guide the work. • Met with representatives from area counties. • Informed other groups in those counties such as NAACP, Local Affiliates, etc, about the conversations. • Contacted churches and other religious organizations. • Recruited and trained facilitators. • Recruited heavily in the African-American communities in the selected counties.	• Publicized the conversations through local media, church bulletins, fliers, local contacts, etc. • Became familiar with some non-traditional media (i.e., community bulletins, newsletters, etc). • Made sure that the media did not infringe upon the conversations. • Will be using media to highlight important issues related to the follow-up work	• Kept records on the development of local conversation model (its basis and its components) • Kept records of our recruitment methods. • Kept record of attendance (who came, who didn't). • Kept records of the conversations. • Submitted a progress report and Action Plan report to PEN. • Shared (or are sharing) our model, methods, and lessons learned with other groups through efforts such as the PEN annual conference, newsletter, etc.	• Three conversations: One in each of three rural counties. • Three town meetings. (Did not break participants into separate groups.) • Average length of town meeting was two hours. • Meeting attendance ranged from 15 to 45.	*Status of goals* *Unintended or unexpected outcomes* *Challenges* *Lessons learned*

RESOURCES

For more information call or write the following individuals and organizations.

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Melissa Zack, PEN

This report was developed from reports and interviews with the individuals listed above and from the information presented in Public Agenda's *Time To Move On* report and "Helping All Students Succeed In A Diverse Society" video. (October 1999 – January 2000)

APPENDIX

NATIONAL PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

Public Education Network (PEN)

The Public Education Network is a national association of local education funds working to improve public school quality in low-income communities nationwide. PEN works to educate the nation about the relationship between school quality and the quality of community and public life. Equal opportunity, access to quality public schools, and an informed citizenry are all critical components of a democratic society. The Network's goal is to ensure that the availability of high-quality public education is every child's right and not a privilege.

Improving public school systems is the responsibility of parents, individual citizens, and whole communities. Students, teachers, and school districts all need to be held to high standards. The Network advocates for significant changes in how school systems are funded, overhauling curriculum and assessment practices, ensuring authority and decision making at the school level, providing ongoing professional development for teachers, and engaging the public in building relationships between citizens, schools, and the communities they serve.

The Public Education Network is the nation's largest network of independent, community-based school reform organizations. Through 53 members in 27 states and the District of Columbia, the Network serves more than 6 million children in more than 300 school districts. In the last two years, LEFs provided nearly $127 million to the nation's public schools through more than 300 targeted school improvement programs.

Local Education Funds

Local education funds (LEFs) are tax-exempt, nonprofit, community-based organizations who work to improve student achievement for all children attending public schools. A local education fund convenes key players in the community, administers innovative school programs, brokers resources, awards grants, and enhances the visibility and value of the public schools.

Local education funds are independent of the school districts they serve and are focused on the improvement and reform of the public school system as a whole. LEFs are organized as ongoing community organizations with professional full-time staff and boards of directors reflective of the communities they serve.

LEFs work with public school systems, serving a significant population of disadvantaged students. Fifty-three percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in the communities served by Network members, compared to the U.S. average of 33 percent. Nearly two-thirds of the children reached by the Network are children of color.

LEFs convene a wide range of stakeholders to help develop and implement local public school improvement strategies. In cooperation with schools, business, and other communities-based organizations, LEFs broker creative school reform initiatives with teachers, school boards, and administrators.

Web site: www.PublicEducation.org

Public Agenda

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues and to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view. Public Agenda's in-depth research on how citizens think about policy forms the basis for extensive citizen education work. Its citizen education materials, used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country, have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from major political parties and from experts and decisionmakers across the political spectrum. For communities interested in public engagement initiatives, Public Agenda also offers assistance in planning, consulting, discussion frameworks, moderator training, and video and printed materials.

Web site: www.surdna.org

W. K. Kellogg Foundation

W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to apply knowledge to solve the problems of people. Through grant initiatives, it helps people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.

Its founder, W. K. Kellogg, the cereal industry pioneer, established the Foundation in 1930. Since its beginning, the Kellogg Foundation has continuously focused on building the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to solve their own problems.

Web site: www.wkkf.org

C. S. Mott Foundation

CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

The mission of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is to support efforts that promote a just, equitable, and sustainable society. Its grantmaking is organized into four programs: civil society, environment, poverty, and issues specific to the city of Flint, Michigan.

The Mott Foundation believes a fundamental need of humanity is to understand how people can live together more effectively. Building strong communities through collaboration provides a basis for positive change. Through its work, the Mott Foundation has found that the most effective solutions often are those devised locally, where people have the greatest stake in the outcome. For that reason, it believes strong, self-reliant individuals are essential to a well-functioning society, and moreover, these individuals play critical roles in shaping their surroundings.

Web site: www.mott.org

Rockefeller Foundation

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

The Rockefeller Foundation is a philanthropic organization endowed by John D. Rockefeller and chartered in 1913 for the well-being of people throughout the world. It is one of America's oldest private foundations and one of the few with strong international interests. From its beginning, the Rockefeller Foundation has sought to identify, and address at their source, the causes of human suffering and need.

In 1998, the Foundation organized its programs around eight core strategies. Together, these strategies constitute the Foundation's commitment to help define and pursue a path toward environmentally sustainable development consistent with individual rights and more equitable sharing of the world's resources.

Web site: www.rockfound.org

Surdna Foundation

The Surdna Foundation, Inc., a private, grantmaking foundation located in New York City, focuses on the environment, community revitalization, effective citizenry, the arts, and nonprofit-sector initiatives. The Foundation states it is: "...interested in fostering catalytic, entrepreneurial programs that offer viable solutions to difficult systemic problems."

Web site: www.surdna.org

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